



LawWorks Clinics Network Report

Analysis of clinic activity between
January 2021 – December 2021

June 2022

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Introduction

LawWorks supports and develops a network of legal advice clinics across England and Wales. Working with the organisers of these free legal advice clinics has been a long-standing feature of LawWorks' work. As of December 2021 there were 306 clinics in the LawWorks Clinics Network.

This report covers the calendar year 2021, a year when there were various restrictions in place because of Covid-19. The restrictions changed throughout the year and there were differences between England and Wales. It was clear from last year's report that the diverse Clinics Network responded to the many challenges it faced. Clinics have once again shown great resilience and this report highlights how clinics have responded to the continued challenges they have faced.

Throughout this report we will look at the figures from 2019 and 2020 when the pandemic hit. The lockdown started in March of that year. We will relate the figures from this year's report covering 2021 and contrast them with these years.

For clients of the services provided, this was another exceptionally challenging year. Many of the people who seek advice from the clinics are the most disadvantaged and isolated in our communities and it is profoundly important that they are able to access legal advice and information.

As in 2020, clinics have reported that they have operated at reduced capacity and some services were suspended. The pandemic impacted on the level of pro bono provision and indeed the clinics' data for this period. We asked for information as to what affected the ability to provide a service. The challenges of moving to a digital service, or to a hybrid service, of students not being able to come onto the campus and illness – there were many difficulties. One clinic put it succinctly 'Lockdown, isolation and illness have all played a part'.

Nevertheless over 64,000 enquiries were handled.

We have highlighted in previous reports that the data collected is as much a measure of 'supply' as it is of 'demand'. It is clear that pro bono plays an important role in enabling access to justice but should never be seen as an alternative to legal aid, nor for funding the essential role of Law Centres and advice agencies. Pro bono works most effectively when it complements and supports wider legal and advice provision and is tailored to particular areas of need.

We are grateful to all clinics for reporting to us particularly at a time when resources are so stretched. It helps us pull together this snapshot of the past year, and we will continue to work with clinics to refine what we ask for, so that we capture, with the least administrative burden for our partners, the work being carried out.

LawWorks is very proud to be working with and supporting the thousands of lawyers, law school staff, advice agencies, law students and other volunteers across the network.



Rebecca Wilkinson
Chief Executive

Methodology

Each January LawWorks requests data from the clinic co-ordinators who collect statistics for the previous calendar year. This report is based on the data supplied which sets out the pro bono activity in clinics across England and Wales.

Clinics do not necessarily gather all the information we ask for on their case management systems but over the years the data collection has greatly improved and become more meaningful. We support clinics with the monitoring and recording, and providing tools that can be used, such as access to a document storage and case management system, as well as diversity and data recording templates. With the arrival of Covid-19 we asked for further information to report on the effect it has had on running the clinics.

For a full list of clinics, starting with Aberystwyth University – Family Legal Advice Clinic and ending with York St John Law Clinic, see the LawWorks website¹. Our website enables people to search for a clinic near them and sets out the areas of law that clinics cover. We update this information as services evolve. We proactively contact clinics to monitor their response to Covid-19 and update the information e.g. if they have added another area of law or whether they have opened their physical doors again.

The data gathered is then pulled together and checked. We can then produce this report setting out the picture throughout England and Wales. The data tells us where the clinics are based, how many people use them, what service they receive, what areas of law are covered, the number of volunteers, the make-up and diversity of clinics and all the other information in this report.

Clinic co-ordinators can also provide more information in free text boxes and we have used some of their comments to illustrate the challenges clinics have faced.

Once again, we thank everyone who collected data, supplied data and the co-ordinators and administrative colleagues who sent this over to us. This is always a time-consuming task for everyone involved and we will continue to be mindful of the need to only collect necessary data. This is very much a partnership approach with clinics and we listen carefully to their feedback.

A network in a challenging environment

LawWorks continues to support and develop the thriving network of legal advice clinics across England and Wales in this very challenging environment.

There is not just one model for clinics. Each is different but usually they involve a partnership bringing together law schools, law firms and legal teams with advice charities and other charities to support individuals in their local community.

There were 175 clinics in the network in 2014. That number increased by over one hundred in the next five years. In March 2020, when lockdown started, there were 280 clinics. Nearly all clinics temporarily suspended face-to-face advice sessions but by the end of December 2020, 189 clinics were once again operational. One year later in December 2021, 252 clinics were operational. Of those that submitted data, 186 were fully open and 25 partly open, while 12 clinics reported that they did not open in 2021. LawWorks supported clinics to transition to remote services in 2020 and continued to support them as they tackled the very challenging environment faced in 2021.

The reasons reported for not opening or only partly opening reflect experiences over the pandemic in both England and Wales. Government advice about working from home, travelling and social distancing were important factors affecting operational issues. Organisations had to develop policies which enabled them to function and ensured the safety of staff and clients.

“Unfortunately we had to take the decision not to open during this period because of the pandemic.”

“The clinic has been closed all year due to Covid. We have only been able to offer a minimal service with a small number of appointments with our Student Advisors led by an Academic Supervisor.”

Services were stretched because of the restrictions and also because of illness or staff leaving – there were many pressures on services. In some universities students were unable to come onto the campus. Some reported that there were still difficulties with the technical side of running services remotely.

“We saw a massive increase in new enquiries and we unfortunately have limited capacity as we are a small team. We also had less in person volunteers due to COVID. Another challenge was clients not being able to access an adviser during the pandemic and the clinics ability to be accessible for clients e.g. remote working, digital literacy.”

“We have not had some of our students to use as a resource which impacts on the number of people we can assist.”

“Our main challenge this year has been around capacity and we had to close for referrals from mid-November 2021 to work through the backlog of cases we had.”

The challenges faced were not just because of the pandemic. With severe cuts in free legal advice and support and the continuing impact of the cuts arising from LASPOⁱⁱ there has been a massive decrease in the availability of legal aid, and with agencies facing funding difficulties themselves, the ability to deliver services remains challenging.

"The number of calls that the service has received has recently increased which has caused a backlog of clients. This has meant we have had to increase student volunteer shifts to handle the influx of clients."

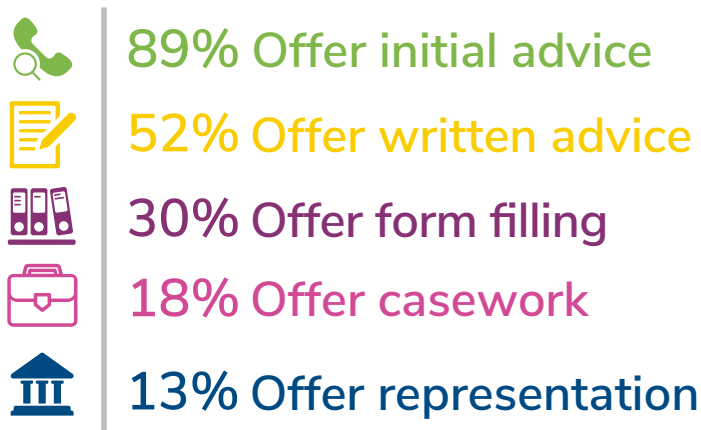
"Unable to work with all clients due to sheer volume of cases - due to lack of funding for staff."

"Increased demand being dealt but no increase in funding. Front line staff answering calls experiencing burn out."

"... the increase in demand has put a strain on how quickly we can give clients appointments."

The figure below sets out what services are offered by clinics.

Figure 1: Types of clinic service



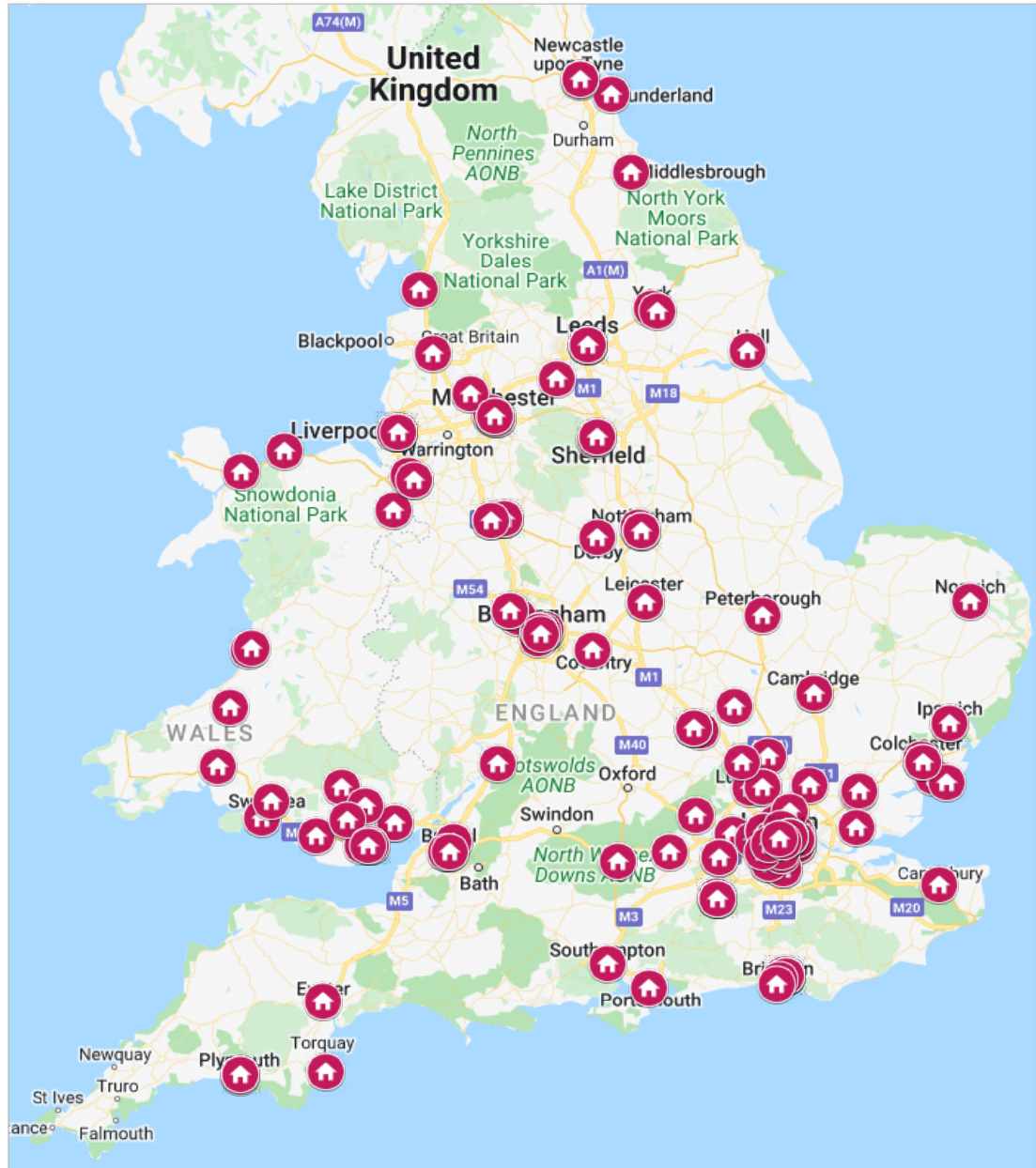
These figures do not add up to 100% as some clinics offer more than one service.

Location of law clinics

The challenge, as set out in earlier reports, of the shortage of legal advisers in social welfare law continues. Legal advice ‘deserts’ have been a feature for many years.

The Law Society in May 2022 updated their heat maps showing shortage of providers across the countryⁱⁱⁱ for community care, education, housing, immigration and asylum and welfare - it is clear that the shortage of legal aid providers continues to be a problem.

Figure 2: Map of clinics on the LawWorks Clinics Network in England and Wales^{vi}



People seeking advice may be unable to find a legal aid provider because the area of law is out of scope (e.g. most disputes regarding employment, children, most welfare benefit and immigration cases and a lot of housing cases) or because they are just outside the legal aid eligibility limits, which have not been uprated for many years^{iv}. Or it may be that they are financially eligible and that the area of law is in scope, but that there is no legal aid lawyer available to take on the case. This may be because there aren't any in the area, or because those who are contracted to do this work are simply too busy to take on everyone who has a case, however strong that case may be.

LawWorks is clear that pro bono work should not be expected to fill these gaps. As we say in our Activities and Impact Report: 2020-2021^v

“Pro bono is not a substitute for legal aid, but its contribution is necessary, significant and growing. It is crucial that we work to understand the role and impact of pro bono, to ensure that it has the greatest possible impact, is targeted in its approach, and is able to reach those in need at the earliest opportunity.”

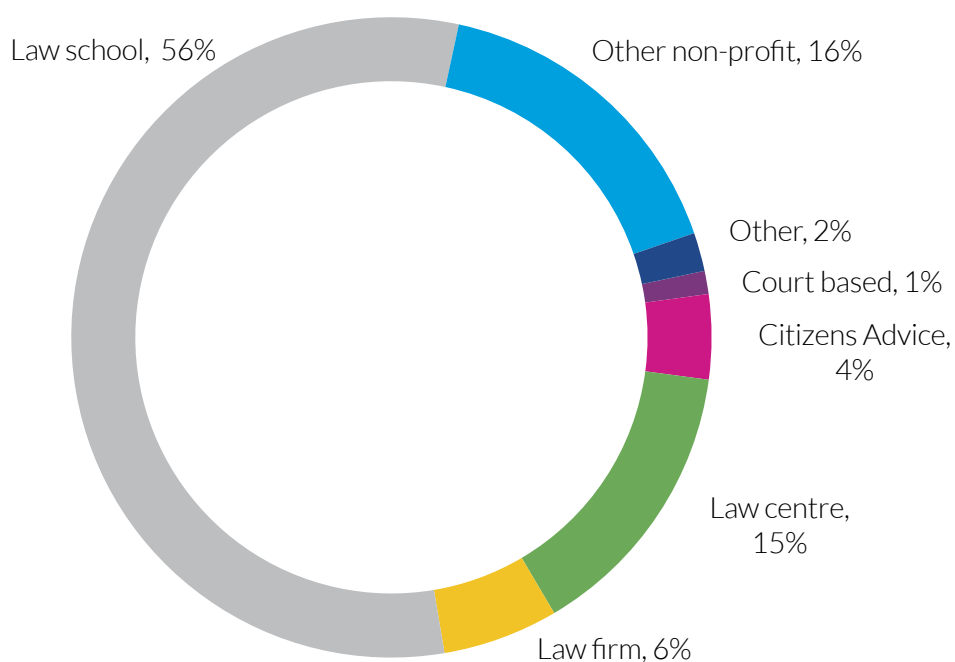
Most clinics are single entities but a few organisations run several clinics. From the map on the previous page it can be seen that there are a large number of clinics across England and Wales and that they are often in areas of high unmet need.

Figure 3: Number of clinics in each region and setting

	Citizens Advice	Court based	Law Centre	Law Firm	Law School	Other	Other non-profit	Total
East	5			2	7		3	17
East Midlands	1			2	6	2		11
Greater London	4	2	32	7	44	1	28	118
North East			2		4			6
North West			1	1	20			22
South East					14		4	18
South West			1		11		1	13
Wales	1		1	1	4		3	10
West Midlands		1		1	19	2	3	26
Yorkshire				1	15			16
Total	11	3	37	15	144	5	42	257

Drilling down to the actual location of the clinics as can be seen from Figure 4 below, the majority are in law schools.

Figure 4: Clinic by setting



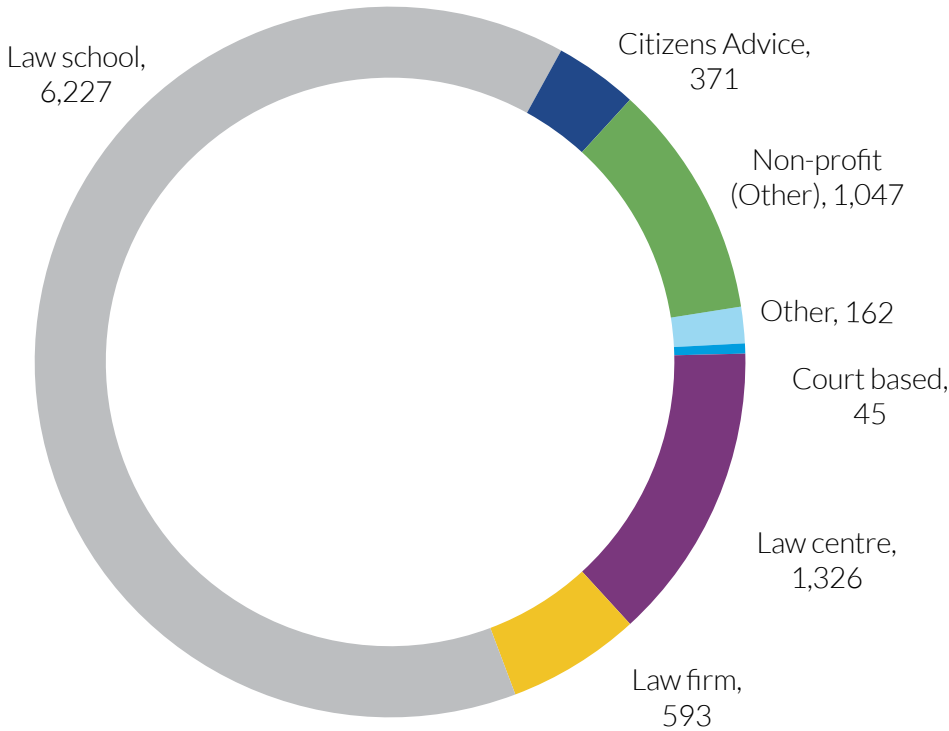
A volunteering network

Clinics are run by a diverse range of stakeholders and partnerships: by law schools, advice agencies, charities community groups, law firms and in-house legal teams. LawWorks’ clinic support and development officers support this network of independent legal advice clinics, enabling us to facilitate increased access to free legal help.

Who are the volunteers? They are solicitors (individuals, firms and in-house teams), law students and other legal professionals.

The clinics are attached to law schools, advice agencies or other charities/community organisations, and operate in those settings.

Figure 5: Number of volunteers by clinics by setting



Clinics reported that there were 9,771 volunteers including students, qualified lawyers and other volunteers. This is a fantastic achievement as in the pre-pandemic year of 2019 there were 9,545 volunteers. In 2020 the numbers, as would be expected with all the challenges, reduced to 9,045 volunteers. Therefore the 2021 figures are an increase on the pre-pandemic numbers.

Figure 6: Volunteering and advice



Clinics gave us more information about volunteers. There is a huge variation between clinics even within university clinics. These are some of the reported numbers of volunteers and who they are.

Figure 7: Illustration of numbers of volunteers in a clinic

No. of volunteers	Comments
2	I have students who assist on background and I give training advice on this topic
5	This clinic consists of one supervising module leader and 4 students
9	We have 9 volunteers who take up the calls on a rota
86	The numbers of the student volunteers is the highest. They were recruited mainly through the clinic modules
118	We have 118 volunteers helping us from 4 law firms
247	The figures (left) are students working on casework as part of an academic module for which they receive academic credit
262	149 of our volunteers were students, the remaining are solicitors/paralegals/barristers
422	Students, staff and local law firms

One development over the years is volunteering in university clinics counting towards a degree rather than volunteering being an extracurricular activity.

Clinics data and year 2 of Covid-19

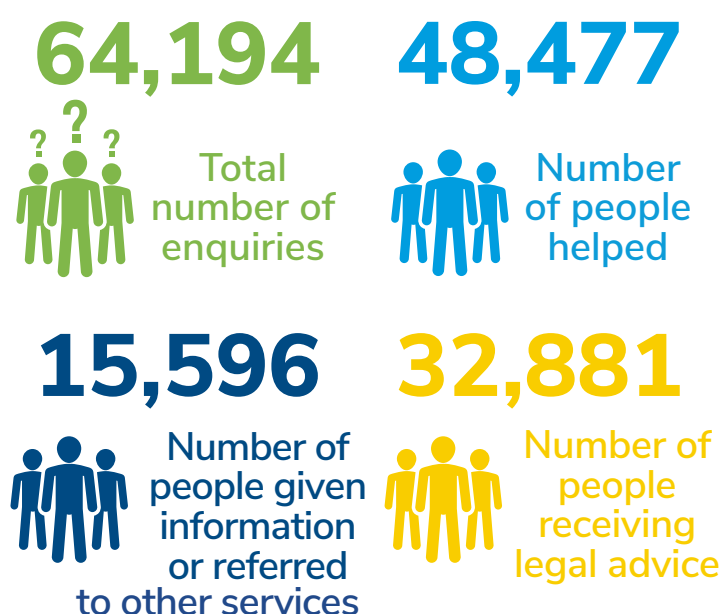
Number of enquiries

The number of enquiries has risen over the years reaching a high in 2019 when there were 77,550 separate enquiries. In 2020 this understandably reduced to 49,651 while clinics grappled with moving their services to remote delivery. There is in 2021 a sizeable increase with clinics reporting 64,194 enquiries.

As can be seen from figure 1, many clinics are now doing more than just initial advice. Originally this was the model of most of the clinics. The aim was to enable the client to progress the matter and strengthen legal capability. The initial advice could also enable clinics to assess if the person was eligible for legal aid or other funded support, whilst a referral could be made to another organisation which specialised in that area of law for.

Figure 8 sets out the number of enquiries received and how they were dealt with.

Figure 8: Enquiries and how they are dealt with

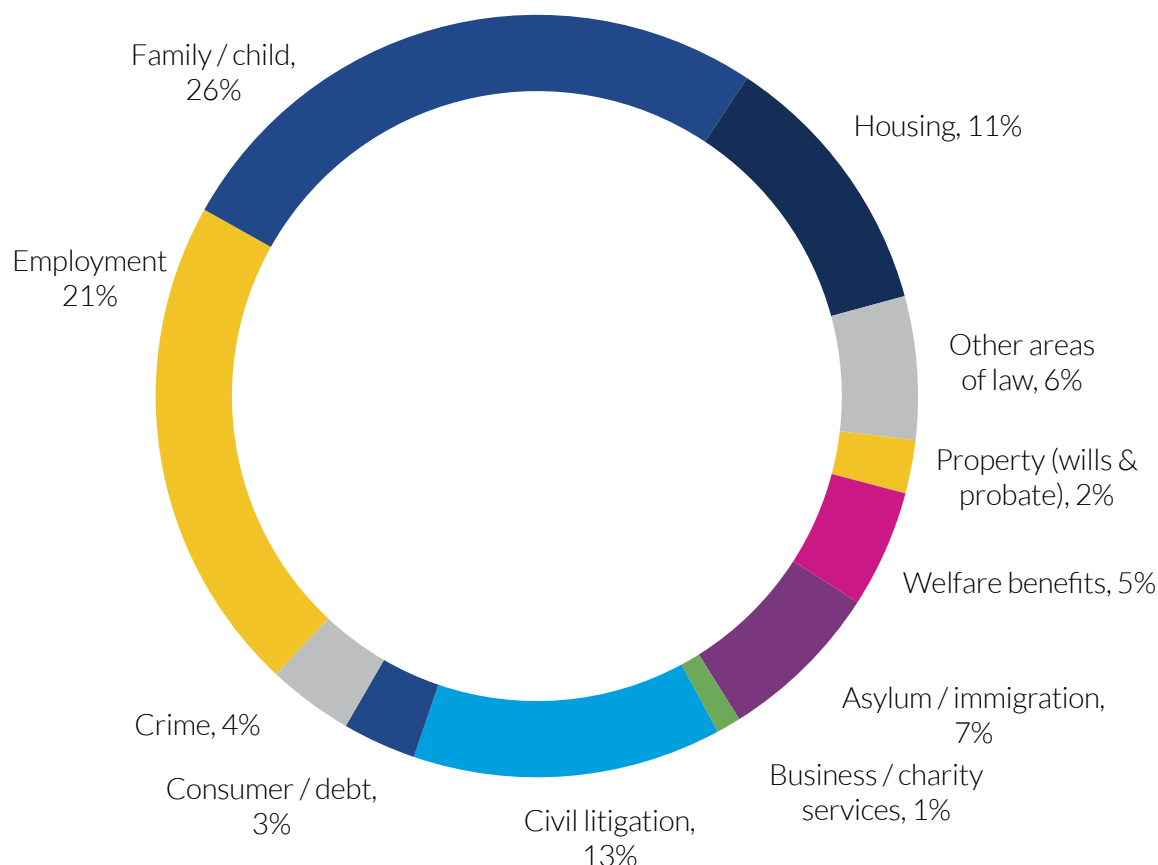


Areas of law

Each clinic decides which areas of law it will offer advice on, informed by local legal need, its own priorities and the expertise of supervisors and volunteers. Some will offer advice on only one or two areas of law and others will be more generalist, covering a wide number of areas of law.

The clinics reported back on the areas of law in which they advised and as in previous years the top two were family and employment matters with family once again the largest area. In 2020 employment cases were slightly higher than family cases so 2021 reverts to the more usual numbers. Predominantly the legal problems can be classified as civil, social welfare and family law problems.

Figure 9. Enquiries by area of law



Breakdown of enquiries by clinic setting/type of clinic

The table below breaks down the type of clinic with the categories referring to where the clinic is based. There are a large number of organisations that fall into the 'other non-profit' category from Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP), Bedfordshire Family Law Telephone Advice Clinic to the Waterloo Legal Advice Service and the Windrush legal advice clinic.

Figure 10: Enquiries by clinic setting

	Enquiries	Provided advice	Given information or referred
Citizens Advice	7,618	4,747	2,851
Court-based non-profit	198	198	0
Law Centre	6,676	5,159	1,038
Law firm	1,314	779	318
Law school /college	21,200	6446	9,077
Non-Profit (Other)	26,972	15,393	2,305
Other	216	159	7
Total	64,194	32,881	15,596

Enquiries and total number of people helped

Within the Clinics Network some organisations work with callers from across the country for example if they run a national telephone advice clinic or enquiries are dealt with online.

As we reported in last year's report, the move to remote working has led to some clinics dealing with more enquiries from outside their area. This year 62% reported helping clients outside their area, while the remaining 38% advised within a geographical location.

Figure 11: Enquiries & total number of people helped

	Enquiries	Provided advice	Given information or referred
National	10,165	6,275	3,006
East	9,730	3,944	867
East Midlands	2,619	488	2,081
Greater London	26,863	15,731	4,586
North East	938	173	10
North West	2,671	1,054	1,274
South East	1,931	967	987
South West	2,721	870	1,094
West Midlands	2,499	1,528	433
Yorkshire & Humber	2,089	588	1,035
Wales	1,968	1,263	223
Total	64,194	32,881	15,596

Client focus and trends in demand

Client demographics

Clinics collect anonymised information about their clients and this enables them and LawWorks to see who is using the services and for equalities monitoring purposes. Clinics have at times had difficulties in collecting data, due to staff shortages, or reliance on others who have not completed all fields or because the challenges of working remotely made it too difficult. Examples include:

We don't have the administrative capacity to collect data at such a granular level (e.g. age, gender, etc.).

We provide all clients with an Equality and Diversity survey but not all clients choose to complete it. We have therefore left this information blank as the data it would provide would not necessarily be reflective of our clinic client demographic.

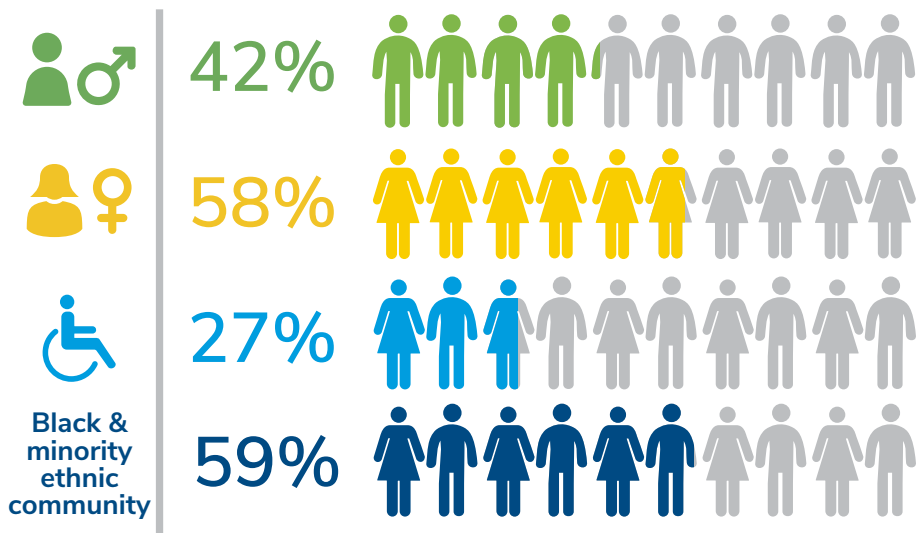
Similar to last year, it has been a challenge to collect complete equality & diversity data through a remote service. Going into 2022, we have changed our process and we hope to have higher engagement with the completion of this information which is so critical to us being able to understand the communities we support with an accurate data set.

We will continue to review how we support colleagues in clinics in accordance with the

good practice in the Equality Act and to understand how the needs of communities are being met.

From the data we have, and excluding where the data is not collected, the numbers advised break down as follows

Figure 12: Client demographics by gender, disability, and black and minority ethnic community



Exclusion and inequality 2021

We started to look more closely at client exclusion and inequality in last year’s analysis. The pandemic has put the spotlight on digital literacy and exclusion issues.

In 2020 we reported that 47% of clinics that responded had seen an increase in the numbers of clients with literacy or digital exclusion issues and flagged up that in moving to remote delivery services had been less accessible for digitally excluded clients.

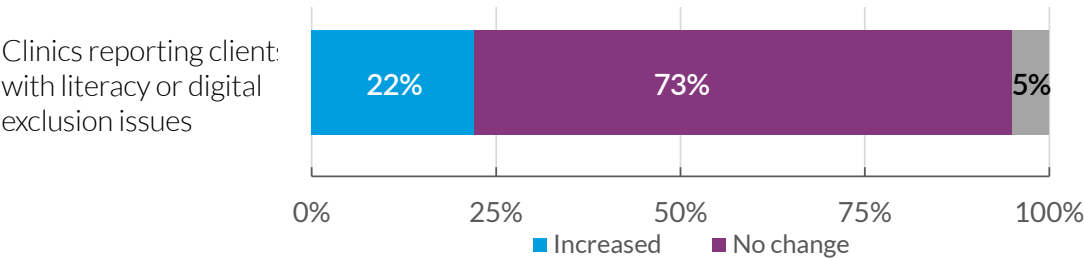
In 2021 most clinics reported no change in literacy or digital exclusion (73%) while 21% reported an increase and only 5% reported a decrease.

“We continued to face challenges with assisting digitally excluded clients.”

“Meeting the needs of clients with low literacy or digital exclusion issues, non-English speaking and most vulnerable has put strain on how quickly we can give clients appointments.”

“Working over zoom has presented challenges for some of our clients who are not IT literate or do not have access to the internet.”

Figure 13: Literacy and digital exclusion



Clients presenting in crisis

While what is meant by 'clients presenting in crisis' is of course subjective, we did ask for feedback on whether the numbers have increased, decreased or there is no change.

There was a 43% increase, 3% decrease and 53% no change.

Complexity of legal matters

Again, while this is subjective, the same trend is apparent. 36% say that complexity of legal matters on which the clients seek advice have increased, 1% decrease and 63% no change.

Clients with multiple problems

Of the organisations that responded to this question 31% reported an increase, 1% a decrease and 69% no change.

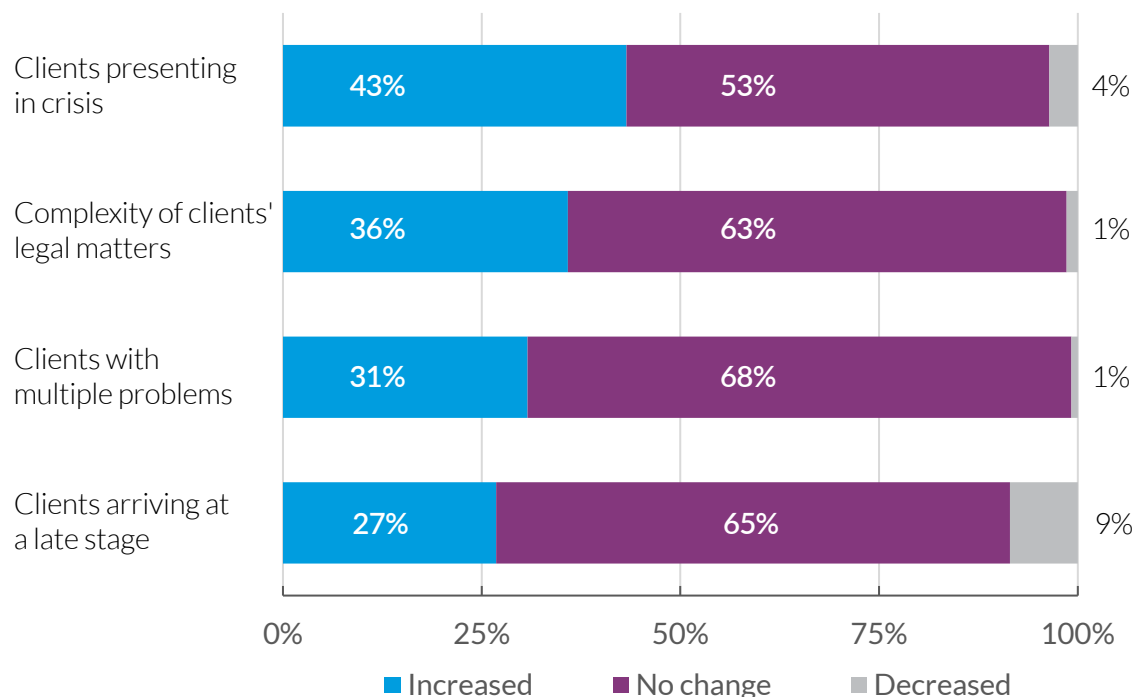
Clients arriving at a late stage

Again, the trend continues. There is a 27% increase in numbers of clients arriving at a late stage, 9% decrease and 65% the same.

"We saw an increased volume of enquiries, many of which were very complex and required multiples conversations with lawyers and clients."

"It has been hard to have a steady flow of suitable cases because of fluctuation in demand and also the increased complexity of cases."

Figure 14: Trends in demand



Case studies:

Adjusting to a new normal in 2021

In 2021, the pandemic continued to cause a considerable amount of uncertainty with varying restrictions in place across the year. Some clinics that had transformed their services to remote advice delivery opted for a hybrid model, providing remote and in-person advice, to ensure services were accessible to clients whilst also accommodating volunteer preferences.

Bedfordshire Family Law

Bedfordshire Family Law Clinic was set up in May 2021, in response to the escalating family law enquiries and due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown rules. The decision taken from the outset was that the clinic would be run remotely with advice and assistance being offered by telephone.

During the pandemic, the clinic was dealing with approximately 6 to 8 enquiries a week, being open for two days during the week. The clinic has continued to operate by telephone, which has allowed the clinic to not only provide advice to clients in Bedfordshire but in other areas outside Bedfordshire.

The clinic for now intends to continue to operate as a telephone service as this has been effective in providing advice to numerous clients quickly and efficiently. The clinic continues to receive inquiries directly from the public as well as referrals from other organisations and the main issues of concern have been in relation to contact, domestic abuse and divorce related matters.

Bloomsbury Law Clinic – a clinic developed in 2021

It was in January 2021, nearly one year into the pandemic, that Bloomsbury Institute set up a steering group to establish its own clinic. LawWorks provided the steering group with invaluable guidance and support (and free access to Lexis and Intralinks), and the Bloomsbury Law Clinic was formally opened on 14 January 2022 by Lord Neuberger.

Working closely with its Student Guild, the steering group decided that all students (law and non-law) should be provided with the opportunity to engage as volunteers.

The clinic specialises in housing and homelessness law. Due to the pandemic, it was decided that appointments would only be available by telephone or Teams. This worked well from both an administrative and accessibility perspective, and it has been decided to continue this practice. While the clinic is mindful that this could exclude the digitally disadvantaged, evidence suggests that the clinic is attracting clients that would not be able to access the service if they had to attend a face-to-face appointment. It has also provided student volunteers and supervising lawyers with increased flexibility and this has resulted in high levels of engagement.

Establishing a new clinic during the pandemic was a challenge but it meant that questions that might not otherwise have arisen had to be addressed, and this has led to a more innovative and impactful service.

Cardiff Lawyers Care Homelessness Advice Clinic

Cardiff Lawyers Care is a partnership between Cardiff & District Law Society, the University of South Wales Legal Advice Clinic and leading Welsh homelessness charity, The Wallich. The clinic was initially set up as a face-to-face drop-in at a night shelter in Cardiff in late 2019. The pandemic meant the way the clinic operated was reviewed, resulting in the clinic moving online. Despite restrictions subsequently easing, meaning the clinic could have returned to a face-to-face service, it was decided to continue providing a remote service. The key factor in making this decision was because remote delivery of the services meant that the scope of the clinic widened across Wales and was no longer restricted to only those able to attend appointments in Cardiff. In 2021, the clinic saw a fivefold increase in the number of clients because of these changes, with clients accessing the service from Merthyr Tydfil, in the South Wales Valleys, all the way to Anglesey in the North.

London South Bank University Legal Advice Clinic

The LSBU Legal Advice Clinic has purpose-built premises on the campus of London South Bank University. The clinic's strength has always been its physical presence in a street location with drop-in advice sessions accessible to the public. The pandemic posed particular challenges in adapting this model to an online service.

LSBU opened its virtual clinic in September 2020 using Microsoft Teams. Through trial and error, an online appointment system was found to be more effective and caused fewer technical obstacles than virtual drop-in sessions. Noticeably, the demographic of clients changed; the more technically able clients were able to access our services without difficulty, but the online services caused barriers to lots of clients who would normally use the services.

In September 2021, the clinic was very pleased to be able to reopen the usual face-to-face drop-in service. The demand for its services has grown over the years following the demise of legal aid and there has been a corresponding expansion in the student population. These two factors led the clinic to keep the virtual service and increase the number of drop-in sessions. The flexible nature of an online clinic meant capacity could be increased and the service could be extended to clients who would find a drop-in service more difficult to access. Through online delivery of their Windrush Justice Clinic, LSBU can also advise clients who live farther afield than London and even sometimes clients who are abroad.

LawWorks support

The LawWorks Clinics Team, working across all regions in England and in Wales, continued to develop and support a growing network of independent free legal advice clinics, enabling us to facilitate increased access to justice. Clinics are run by a diverse range of stakeholders and partnerships: by law schools, advice agencies, charities, community groups, law firms and in-house legal teams.

LawWorks continues to develop its support for clinics by

- Reviewing and updating information and resources, which are compiled in the [Clinic Resources section](#) of the LawWorks website.
- Producing a [Pro Bono Clinics Manual](#), which was published during Pro Bono Week 2021.
- Publishing our monthly newsletter for clinics.
- Holding events for the network including the annual Clinics Conference first held in 2019. The 2021 conference '[Legal Pro Bono: Facing the Future](#)' was held online on 8th and 9th July.
- Continuing the 2020 development of the new platforms and approaches to supporting clinics in response to Covid-19, including:
 - Monthly online information exchanges aka 'InfoExchanges' and
 - Continuing with the 2020 initiative of an online forum for the clinics network.
- LawWorks continued to provide specific Covid-19 guidance for clinics, and a range of resources to aid with moving to a remote service, developing accessible services and supporting hard to reach communities and undertaking risk assessments.
- LawWorks provides free access to tools such as case management software and a comprehensive online research library.
- LawWorks training programme has been further developed with new sessions and new content, and is online and open to all.

Here are some of the comments we have received about the support LawWorks and the Clinics Team provide:

"Thank you so much for your unwavering support this year."

"May our law clinic please thank you for all that you and your colleagues do to help other people. It's so appreciated."

"Your advice and insight has been invaluable and the training and information provided by LawWorks has been so helpful."

"It is so nice for us to be working together and we are so grateful for your help again this year."

"What was really helpful [about the Clinics Manual] was having an accessible resource with so much information gathered coherently together in one place."

"I have been struggling to write something that properly expresses just how grim everything feels right now; and how grateful we are to you for sticking with us through the awful times of Covid; and how vitally important your help is for the ... community we serve."

Conclusions

The collection and analysis of the data in this report means that we can reflect on the past, consider the present, and look to the future.

It is clear that clinics have managed their responses to the pandemic by moving firstly to remote working and then either retaining remote working or adopting a hybrid remote and face-to-face advice structure. By the end of 2021, just under 40% of services were being operated in a hybrid manner.

Looking forward, there will be increasing face-to-face services but it seems likely that the successful implementation of remote advice means that digital services will continue. The clinics will continue to reflect on the effect of this on their clients, and on their staff and volunteers. There has been an extraordinary journey from the start of the pandemic when clinics had to close down their face-to-face sessions to the position we are in now. The statistics reflect how fast clinics moved and how far they have travelled.

It is likely that there will be greater need in the future as clients seek advice particularly with debt, benefit, family breakdown and housing problems.

LawWorks will continue to support clinics in developing responses to the problems faced by clients, and will work with clinics to ensure that they continue to provide access to justice for the many people struggling with legal issues.

Endnotes

- i The LawWorks website has a search tool enabling visitors to find free legal advice clinics across England and Wales. <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/legal-advice-individuals/find-legal-advice-clinic-near-you>
- ii Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/contents/enacted>
- iii Legal aid desert maps, <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/en/campaigns/legal-aid-deserts>
- iv The Ministry of Justice is consulting on changing the income and capital thresholds for civil and criminal legal aid eligibility, <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/legal-aid/legal-aid-means-test-review/>
- v <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/LawWorks-Impact-Report-2020-21.pdf>
- vi The LawWorks website has a search tool enabling visitors to find free legal advice clinics across England and Wales. <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/legal-advice-individuals/find-legal-advice-clinic-near-you>

LawWorks is a charity working in England and Wales to connect volunteer lawyers with 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.



www.lawworks.org.uk
Registered charity number 1064274

