



# LawWorks Clinics Network Report

Analysis of clinic activity between  
January 2020 – December 2020

**July 2021**

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# Introduction

LawWorks supports and develops a growing network of independent pro bono legal advice clinics across England and Wales. Setting up and supporting free legal advice clinics has been a long-standing feature of our work, and as of June 2021 there are 300 clinics (across England and Wales) in the LawWorks Clinics Network.

This report covers a period in which clinics have mostly been operating under the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and dealing with the impact of the ongoing public health crisis. It covers clinic activity from January to December 2020.

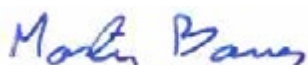
The LawWorks Clinics Network is diverse, but the traditional model is based on face to face advice sessions provided by legal professionals or law students. University campus buildings, community centres, libraries, church halls and advice centres have all served as settings for delivering free legal advice sessions. In March 2020 that all changed yet, despite the challenges, clinics responded quickly and effectively to the lockdown and have continued to deliver vital pro bono services, pivoting to remote methods, and adapting to meet changed conditions.

Inevitably the pandemic impacted on the level of pro bono provision, and clinics' data for this reporting period. Whilst many clinics have operated at reduced capacity, and some had to temporarily suspend their services, across the network clinics have still dealt with a high number of enquiries – nearly 50,000 over the year, and delivered either advice or other support, including sign-posting, to over 43,000 people.

The many thousands of lawyers, law school staff, law students and other volunteers across the network should feel immensely proud of what they have been able to do. There has never been a more important time to ensure that people, often the most vulnerable and isolated in our communities, receive the support they need, including access to legal advice and information.

LawWorks is passionate about pro bono and its contribution to enabling access to justice; the legal profession's willingness to volunteer and devote time, experience and skills to help those in need should be highly valued. However, it is always necessary to underscore that pro bono is not, and should never be seen as, an alternative to legal aid, nor for funding for the vital work 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.

Given the unique challenges over the period of the pandemic we are reluctant to draw too many conclusions from last year's data – as with all reporting systems, the data collected is as much a measure of 'supply' as it is of 'demand'. But it is indicative of the important role that pro bono plays. I hope, as we continue to emerge from this difficult period, that the contribution is recognised, and that experience from the need to deliver services remotely can have a potentially lasting and positive impact.



Martin Barnes  
Chief Executive

# Methodology

Every year LawWorks requests data from clinics registered with our network in order to gather an accurate account of pro bono activity in clinics across England and Wales. The reporting period is based on the calendar year, so in January an online survey is sent out to all clinic co-ordinators collecting statistics for 1st January – 31st December for the previous year.

The survey elicits responses on key aspects of each clinic's activities. Broadly, these are: the enquiries received by the clinic; how these enquiries have been dealt with; the area of law advice was given on; as well as numbers of volunteers, and the make-up and diversity of clients accessing the clinic.

We support clinics to monitor and record this information, providing tools that clinic co-ordinators and administrators can use. However, every clinic has its own system for recording client data and collecting statistics. Not all clinics are able to provide the requested data, but in recent years we have seen increased reporting levels. In 2018, following a review of our data collection, we implemented a new process which reduced the number of questions (data points) asked and the frequency of requests. This has raised the level of data returns to over 75% of clinics across the network.

In approaching the data collection process for the most recent reporting period, we have had to reflect on the impact of Covid-19 on clinics in the network. We decided to continue to collect data for 2020, but recognising that it has been an extremely challenging period for all clinics. In addition to the usual data requested, we asked for further information on the impact of Covid-19 and added a number of qualitative questions about the data collected and clinic operations over the year, including asking clinics whether they had been able to keep their clinic running, service adjustments, trends in demand, challenges experienced over the 2020 period, and reasons for any gaps in the data provided.

LawWorks also maintains a database of key information on each clinic's services based on the information provided by representatives of the clinic at the time of registration to the network. This information is updated on an ongoing basis as the clinic's services evolve and changes are notified to LawWorks. Over the course of the year we proactively kept in contact with clinics to monitor how they adapted to operating during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This report is based on the data collected from our annual survey as well as information ascertained on clinic services during the year. Anonymised quotes from the qualitative feedback questions have also been included.

# A resilient network

LawWorks supports and develops a growing network of legal advice clinics across England and Wales. Setting up and supporting free legal advice clinics has been a long-standing feature of LawWorks' work. The LawWorks Clinics Network in March 2020, just prior to the lockdown, totalled 280 clinics.

The Covid-19 lockdown had an immediate effect - nearly all clinics temporarily suspended face-to-face advice sessions. Government advice throughout the period of the pandemic has been that businesses and workplaces should encourage working at home where possible, and currently (early July 2021) social distancing measures remain in place.

Throughout 2020 LawWorks supported clinics to transition to remote services, so that by the end of the reporting year (December 2020) 189 clinics were again operational. Our guidance to clinics during this period on dealing with the restrictions has emphasised that operating procedures will differ between different clinic settings and stakeholders, so one approach does not fit all.

Whilst each clinic is unique, they generally involve a partnership bringing together a mix of law schools, law firms and legal teams with advice agencies and other charities to support individuals in the local community.

LawWorks helps with the development of new clinic services from the initial idea stage through to piloting and launch, as well as providing ongoing support and consultancy to established clinics. In 2014 there were 175 clinics registered on the LawWorks network, so it is heartening to see that number increase by over 60% during the past 6 years. This rise in clinic activity has coincided with a period of severe public spending cuts for free legal advice and support, with a near 80% loss of funding and capacity in social welfare and family law services following changes to legal aid policy.<sup>i</sup> However, with need for legal advice estimated by researchers to be one in three people or more, the development of pro bono capacity and new clinics alone cannot be expected to address the challenges of unmet need.<sup>ii</sup>

Clinics in the network have traditionally focused on providing initial advice to clients. Previous research we have undertaken on client outcomes<sup>iii</sup> suggests that an initial advice session can provide the reassurance needed for the client to take the issues forward, and strengthen legal literacy and legal capability. Initial advice also provides a space to identify client eligibility for legal aid support, and often clinics provide a gateway to access local legal aid or other funded more in-depth support. However, we increasingly see clinics offering services that go beyond initial advice, and able to deal with more specialist areas of law.

**Figure 1: Types of clinic service**



**90% Offer initial advice**



**55% Offer written advice**



**33% Offer form filling**



**21% Offer casework**



**16% Offer representation**



# Geographical spread

The challenge of legal ‘advice deserts’ has been well documented, including by the Law Society’s ‘End Legal Advice Deserts Campaign.’<sup>iv</sup> This has found, for example, that over a third (37%) of the population of England and Wales live in a local authority area with no housing legal aid providers.

Pro bono clinics cannot (and should not be expected to) fill these gaps in legal aid, either in areas where there is insufficient legal aid supply, or where there is no legal aid because the legal issues are out of scope. However, it is encouraging to see that clinics are spreading out across the English regions and Wales, often focussing on areas of high unmet need. Also, this year more clinics report operating beyond their own locality, or nationally (see figure 7).

**Figure 2: Map of clinics in England and Wales**

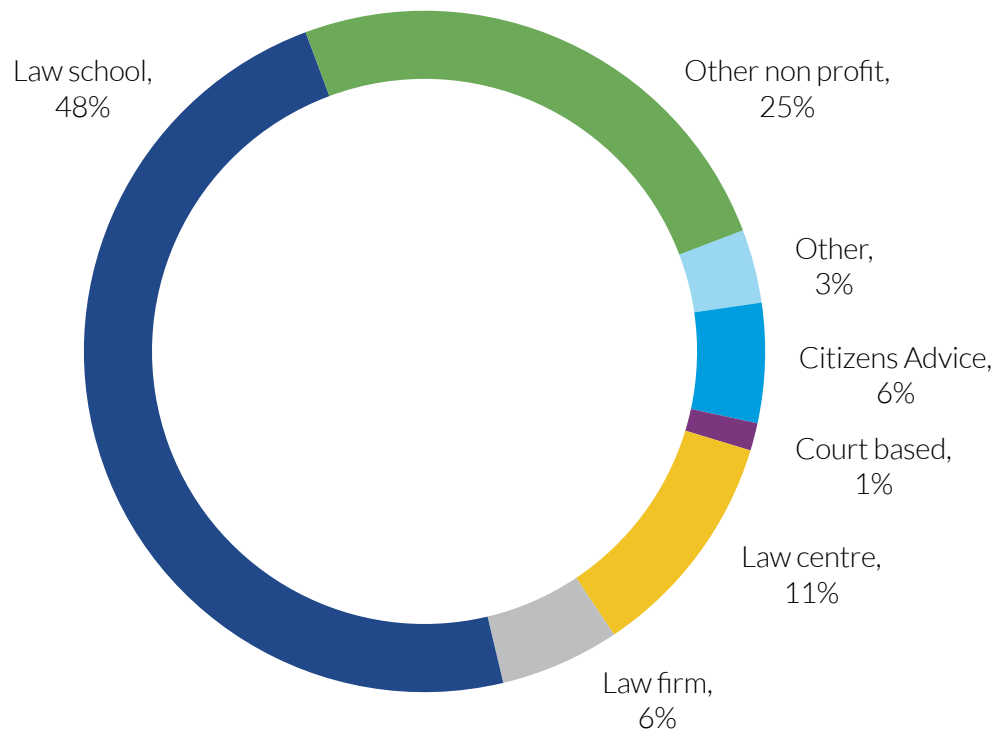


# A volunteering network

All clinics in the LawWorks Clinics Network are independent and self-managed; the network is diverse with significant variations in service models, but they all share the same core components of volunteering, whether by solicitors (individuals, firms and in-house teams), law students or other legal professionals.

Usually clinics are attached to law schools, advice agencies or other charities/community organisations, and law firms. Some organisations may run multiple clinics, for example either in different sites or for different areas of law.

**Figure 3: Clinics by setting**



Across the network clinics reported that during 2020 there were 9,045 volunteers; this included students, qualified lawyers and other volunteers. 34 clinics reported that they had lost volunteers due to the impact of Covid-19, and some clinics commented that Covid-19 had made it harder to monitor the exact number of volunteers over the year. However, encouragingly, 36 clinics reported that they had recruited more volunteers.

**Figure 4: Volunteering and advice**

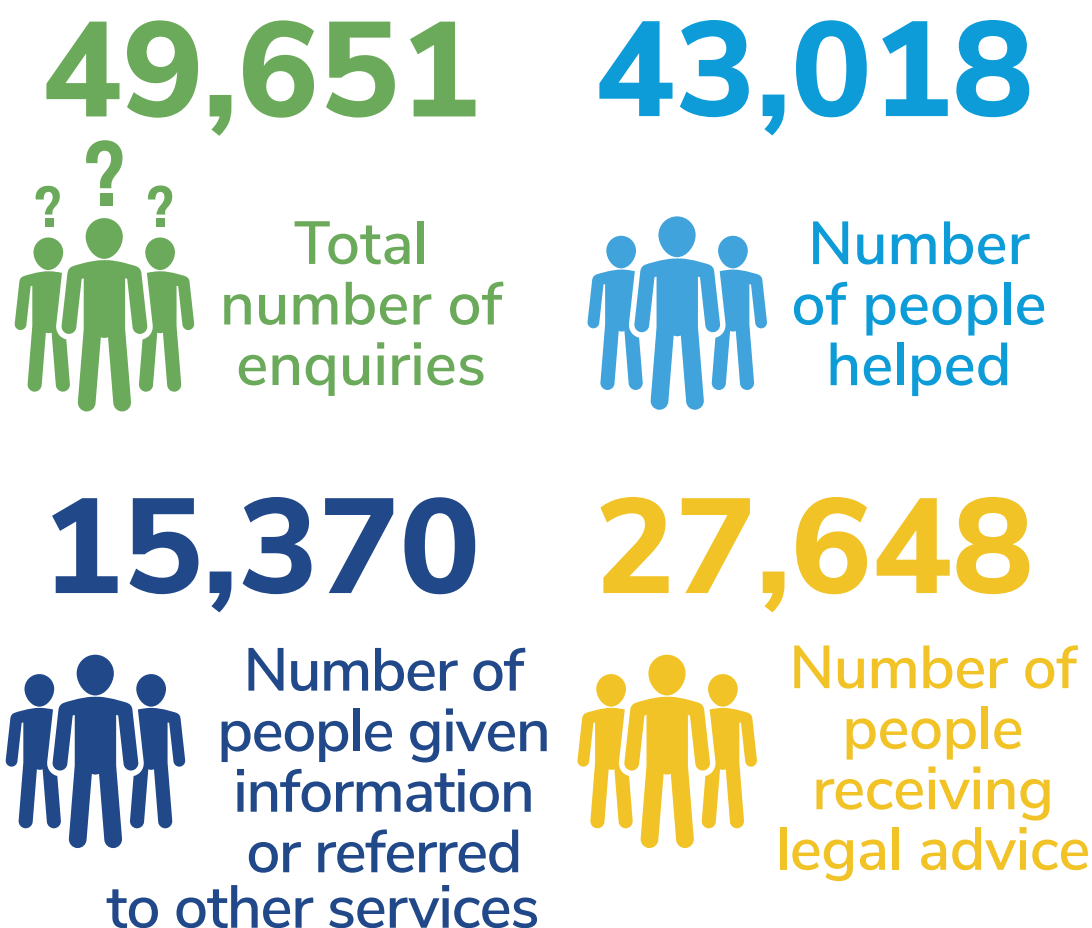


# Clinics data and Covid-19

Year on year, our data has shown an increase in the number of enquiries received, and an increase in the number of clients that clinics have been able to provide support to. The highest recorded level of enquiries was in 2019 with 77,550 separate enquiries received by clinics across the network, compared to 75,907 enquiries received in 2018. Of the enquiries recorded in 2019, 70,261 people were helped, and 37,551 clients (53%) received legal advice.

For the 2020 reporting period we anticipated that clinics would be recording significantly fewer enquiries due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on operations, and that fewer clinics might be able to provide full data for the year. Yet, despite the pandemic, we received 185 data returns for the 2020 reporting period; some single data returns were provided on behalf of several clinics, for example where clinics were in the process of amalgamating, so the returns account for the data of 222 clinics across the network. This represents 77% of clinics in the network. 49,651 separate enquiries were reported, and 87% of enquiries resulted in either advice (56%) or signposting (31%). We explore the impact of Covid-19 on clinic operations further in pages 11-14, including how the pandemic has affected this year's data.

**Figure 5: Enquiries and how they are dealt with**





## Breakdown of data by region, clinic type and area of law

We have further broken down the proportion of enquiries by regional location or type of clinic (i.e. law school based, court based, advice agency based, etc), and by area of law.

Law school clinics dealt with the most enquiries (37%), this broadly reflects the distribution of clinic types across the network.

**Figure 6: Enquiries by clinic organisation**

	Enquiries	Provided advice	Given information or referred
Citizens Advice	9131	4787	4343
Court-based non-profit	124	124	0
Law Centre	5292	4096	1050
Law firm	1400	369	513
Law school /college	18397	6138	7690
Other non-profit	14781	11742	1718
Other	526	392	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>49651</b>	<b>27648</b>	<b>15370</b>

Whilst clinics in the network are spread across England and Wales (see figure 2), the impact of Covid-19 and the move to remote working meant that some clinics have increasingly been dealing with enquiries from outside their locality. Nearly a quarter of enquiries were from 'national' clinics providing services to individuals across England and Wales regardless of where the client is based, often via online or telephone advice clinics (e.g., national advice lines for specific areas of law).

Of the remainder, there is considerable variation across the regions, which reflects the concentration of clinics seen in different parts of England and Wales. Over 40% of enquiries received and advice given across the network occurs in Greater London.

**Figure 7: Enquiries & total number of people helped by English regions and Wales**

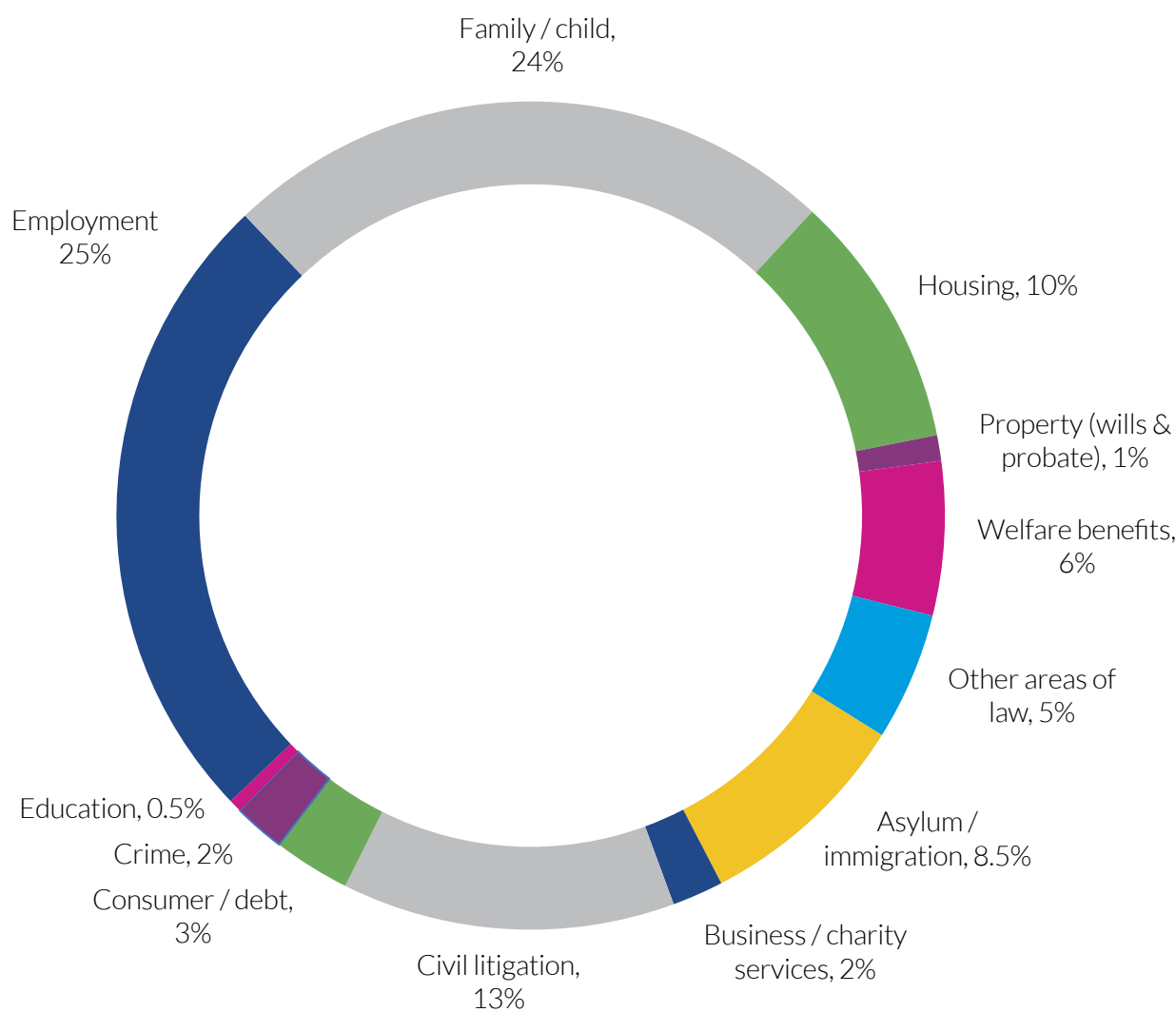
	Enquiries	Provided advice	Given information or referred
National	11683	6069	4834
East	4477	3612	550
East Midlands	2085	478	1118
Greater London	17095	11984	3018
North East	201	129	37
North West	2607	927	1296
South East	1916	560	506
South West	3011	935	1910
West Midlands	3012	1611	858
Yorkshire & Humber	1668	679	591
Wales	1896	664	652
<b>Total</b>	<b>49651</b>	<b>27648</b>	<b>15370</b>

# Areas of law

The legal problems that bring people to pro bono clinics can be very diverse, but are predominantly civil, social welfare and family law problems. 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 clinics are specialist in nature and will narrow their offering to advice within a particular area of law. Other clinics are more generalist in scope, offering advice across a broad spectrum of legal issues.

We have broken down clinic enquiries recorded over 2020 by category of law. The highest number of enquiries over the year was for employment matters; in previous years the highest number of enquiries was for family law matters. This may reflect increasing demand for employment law advice, reported by many organisations over the first period of the pandemic, and the introduction of furlough provisions.<sup>v</sup>

Figure 8: Enquiries by categories of law



## Clinics and the impact of Covid-19

The above figures need to be interpreted in the context of the ongoing impact of Covid-19 in 2020. Following the first lockdown, most clinics had to close their doors and work out how to re-establish their services remotely, while also continuing to engage with and support staff and pro bono volunteers working from home. Clinics that were able to open physically had to install social distancing and sanitizing measures, sometimes in restricted spaces. The lockdown and ongoing restrictions inevitably impacted on the number of enquiries clinics were able to deal with, and also the capacity of clinics to collect data, impacted by some records being inaccessible.

Of the clinics that provided data for the 2020 reporting period, 38 said that they had to close their clinic, and 19 said they had amalgamated existing clinics, for example where clinics operating across multiple sites consolidated their service offer into a single point of email, telephone or online access. Covid-19 also impacted on opening hours; 37 clinics reported that they changed opening hours. 152 of the survey returns said that their clinics had transitioned to a remote service, though in addition it is important to note that a number of clinics have always operated remotely or by telephone. The LawWorks clinics team also worked over the course of the year to establish how many clinics were able to operate remotely; by the end of the year, to the best of our knowledge, this was 189 clinics.

**Figure 9: Clinics operating or transitioned to remote services**



However, we noted some data gaps and a few clinics were only able to answer the qualitative questions, rather than providing detailed statistical information for all data fields, although that in itself was useful. It was clear that data collection over the period of the pandemic had been a challenge. In response to our question about reasons for any gaps in the data provided, feedback from clinics has included the following: records being inaccessible, reduced operational capacity, and service closures.

*We are currently unable to access our office during the lockdown. It is possible that there may be more data and information available in the office itself.*

*..difficulty in assessing our client base and their needs through 2020 resulting from our inability to access records.*

*We do not have access to the data required as the clinic is currently closed due to covid. We have provided data taken from the number of emails received.*

*We have been closed since March 2020 due to Covid-19.*

It was clear from responses to the qualitative questions that clinics had faced many challenges over the year, and whilst many were able move to remote service delivery, this was not without its difficulties, from introducing new processes to maintain client confidentiality to supporting volunteer wellbeing. A number of clinics that were only able to provide telephone advice said that they felt this could be quite limiting, and some clinics highlighted problems around managing documents under remote service models.

*We faced a massive challenge in converting our service from a face-to-face only service to a remote service providing advice via email. This has meant changing all of our working practises and relying on the support of our volunteers to deliver this service. We are also very aware of the fact that we are not able to access a lot of our core audience that we could support face-to-face, because they are not able to use emails etc.*

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*Lack of face-to-face contact, difficulties in obtaining documents, getting documents signed, reduced capacity of other providers in terms of referring cases out.*

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*We found that client numbers were dwindling in March 2020 for obvious reasons. We closed for the first lockdown but were not quick to change to a remote service - I think because we kept thinking that we would be opening again on a face-to-face basis soon and also because the clinic has operated entirely on a paper basis for the past 50 years. When we did reopen in September 2020 the numbers of clients seeking advice was very low again.*

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*We have not been able to participate in as many external projects and were not able to run our summer placement clinic. We were therefore unable to see as many clients throughout the year.*

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*Many of the beneficiaries do not have access to [the] internet so most of our advice was via telephones. As the claims are evidenced based, there were many difficulties collecting documents from them or from third party agencies.*

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*Morale and team spirit were the biggest challenges.*

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*Dealing and co-ordinating with clients and volunteers remotely has proved more time consuming and more difficult than our previous model of holding face to face clinic sessions on a fortnightly basis.*

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## **Clinics and managing demand**

In any year not all enquiries will result in the provision of legal advice, and there may be more demand than clinics are able to respond to. In 2020 clinics identified 5,893 enquiries that they were not able to help with or signpost.

Each clinic will have policies and procedures in place for identifying the types of enquiries that require advice and, if advice is not needed or available, then appropriate information, signposting or referral may be provided. Some matters may be beyond the capacity of clinics to deal with (for example, student clinics have reduced capacity in holiday times), and some presenting problems may be either non-legal issues, or beyond a clinic's expertise. Many clinics have also told us that some people making enquiries do not follow up after making initial contact.

This year was no exception, and Covid-19 exacerbated these challenges at the triage stage. However, a reduced numbers of enquiries, and the capacity to deal with them, compared to previous years, should not be interpreted as evidence of reduced demand. Some comments from clinics, below, illustrate this:

*The reduction in demand is as a result of no face to face availability regarding the pandemic - telephone calls received compared to 2019/20 reduced also.*

*The reason the client enquiries were higher than those we actually saw in the clinic was a combination of things such as matters being outside the remit of the clinic, for example immigration enquiries, clients simply not showing up for their appointment and then lockdown, which saw the clinic close and a few weeks of advance bookings being cancelled.*

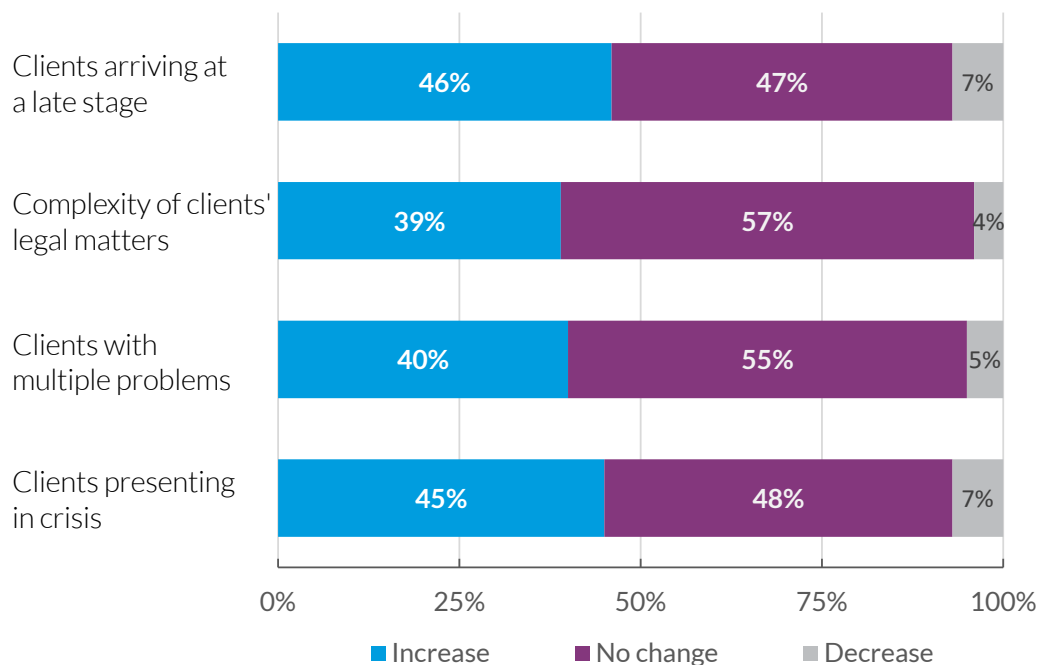
*The number of people we are unable to help increased considerably, partly due to the fact that we had a long period of closure during the first lockdown, before we went online. There is also an increasing demand for financial advice which we are unable to help with.*

*We do not record the number of incoming enquiries, only the number of appointments booked.*

*Due to staffing constraints we could not log all queries that did not result in assistance at the clinic consistently throughout the year,*

However, the fact that 87% of enquiries did result in either advice or signposting is encouraging (see figure 5). We asked further questions in the survey about how clients present problems in order to try and identify any trends in demand over the Covid-19 period, and nearly half of the clinics responding said that they had seen an increase over the year in the number of clients presenting 'in crisis'.

**Figure 10: Trends in demand**





Relevant comments from clinics about presenting problems, client profiles and trends in demand included:

*We have seen clients much more distressed and isolated and have been concerned about their mental health as they have been unable to attend English classes and social events and seek support and solace in faith institutions.*

*'...by definition everyone who presents to our project is and always has been in crisis and distress... Our clients have always had complex needs, multiple problems.*

*There has been concern about vulnerable clients.*

*We have experienced a small but significant increase in wellbeing issues amongst clients which makes delivering the service more complex.*

*All clients have one or more issues but stress due to lockdown magnifies stress and worries.*

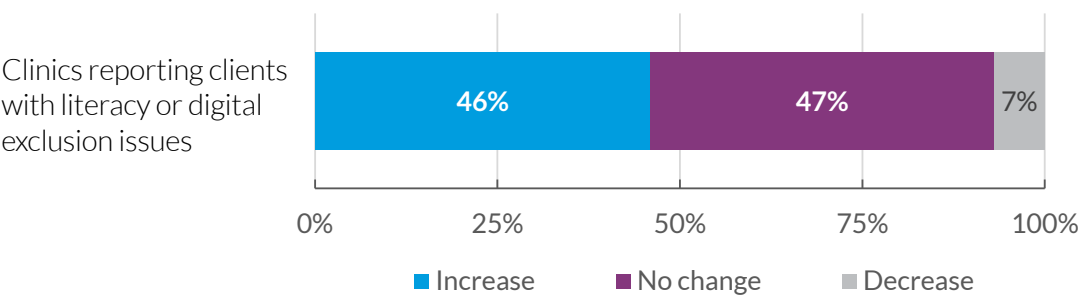
*'...given that we can only reach clients who have good digital literacy this seems to have meant that clients come to us with more research completed, but this also means that they are presenting with more complicated legal problems.*

*Most clients tend to be distressed when we meet them but certainly disruptions to routines and being at home has affected many children [from a clinic working in children's rights and SEN].*

## Client exclusion and inequality

With impacts across the not-for-profit and legal aid sectors, the pandemic has not only widened the gap for those without the means to pay for legal advice, but has also thrown a spotlight on digital literacy and exclusion issues. Whilst 47% of clinics that responded said that they had seen an increase in the number of clients with literacy or digital exclusion issues, clinics also observed that Covid-19 and remote delivery has meant that services have been less accessible for digitally excluded clients.

**Figure 11: Literacy and digital exclusion**



Comments from clinics about the challenges of working with digitally excluded clients included the following:

*Family members have been contacting [us] on behalf of clients with literacy or digital exclusion issues.*

*Levels of literacy and digital exclusion haven't changed since our clients are largely destitute they are extremely digitally excluded to start with. But Covid-19 has made our clients' experience of these problems more acute.*

*The literacy or digital exclusion drop is down to needing to be capable with both when accessing an online service. I imagine there are clients who now don't contact us and see it as a barrier.*

*We have had to turn some clients away because they did not have access to any technology and some of those who had the technology could not work Teams or did not wish to have an appointment via video link.*

*Access for elderly and disabled clients [has been] more difficult. Obtaining documents from clients has been a challenge especially for those without access to the internet.*

*Many of the beneficiaries do not have access to the internet so most of our advice was via telephones. As the claims are evidenced based, there were many difficulties collecting documents from them or from third party agencies.*

*We are not hearing from people we would have seen face to face due to literacy and digital issues.*

*We are unable to reach clients who are digital excluded due to the fact that our service is now all online.*

LawWorks asks clinics to collect anonymised information on the clients they help in order to identify who is benefiting from their services, and for equalities monitoring. This demographic data is important for understanding how well communities with protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010) are able to engage with pro bono legal advice. However, responses to our qualitative questions indicated that clinics had found collecting data about clients especially challenging over the period of the pandemic:

*Our equality and diversity data is not included as we received so few responses, particularly during the first lockdown.*

*Due to staff illness, furlough scheme, lack of volunteer admin support, our equality and diversity data was not collected as diligently as we would have liked.*

*I have been unable to get the data RE demographics because this is in a physical folder in my office. Currently I am not allowed on the University campus and therefore cannot retrieve it.*

*Data system not properly working to find the ethnicity/age/disability.*

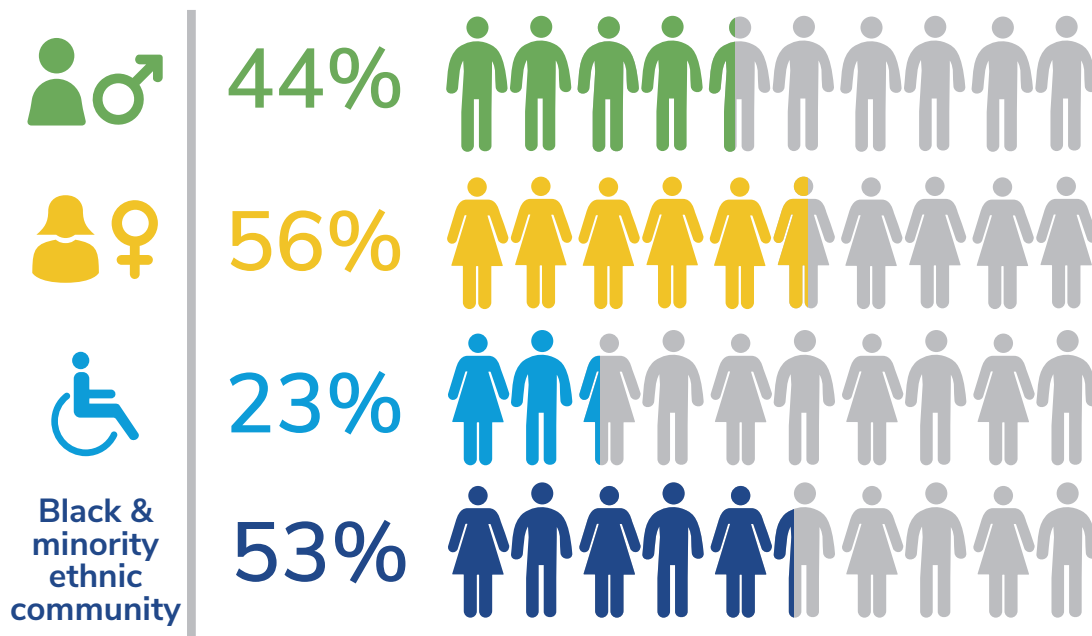
*Because we have been operating remotely and paperless, we have not been collecting data with regards to equality and diversity.*

*We are unable to obtain ethnicity and other data from emails.*

*We do not collect data around gender, ethnicity or age as we do not use it within our organisation.*

Our data on client demographics is therefore not as robust as we would like (i.e., a significant proportion of clinics did not provide complete demographic data) and so it only provides a sample. Nevertheless, compared with previous years the available data suggests that a much higher proportion of clients were from BAME communities.

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



# Case studies: responding to Covid-19

As noted in this report all clinics and services impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic had to make fundamental adjustments. We have compiled some examples of the work of a few selected clinics as case studies to demonstrate how they have been able to adapt and evolve. At the time of writing, as some Covid-19 restrictions continue, (July 2021) 229 clinics (out of 300 clinics registered across England and Wales) report being able to operate remote or Covid-secure services.

## Free Legal Advice Group for Domestic Violence

Prior to lockdown the Free Legal Advice Group for Domestic Violence (FLAG DV) was providing a mixed service with face-to-face clinics (based across the Thames Valley) running alongside some phone support appointments. As the pandemic took hold the service went to a sole phone support service with employees and volunteers all working remotely. Moving to a remote only service, and the flexibility provided by volunteers working from home, has meant that the service has been able to increase its capacity. Previously, advice was only offered on a Tuesday with a maximum capacity of 22 appointments a month. Now, thanks to additional volunteers and their flexibility, FLAG DV can offer clinic appointments 5 days a week with up to 50 appointments. In the past clients were connected to a local solicitor but changing the service has allowed the service to pair clients with a solicitor with more expertise in the particular area of advice instead of geographical location.

## Brunel Legal Advice Centre

In March 2020, when the first national lockdown took place, Brunel Legal Advice Centre based at Brunel University London, took quick action and went virtual from the following week. Bearing in mind the need for employment law advice during the pandemic, the Centre continued throughout the pandemic with an average of two clients a week, prepared cases for the Employment Tribunal and started a new service advising the local Gurkha community from April 2021. Although initially "technical issues" were common, as staff, clients and students got to grips with the technological logistics, they now run smoothly and it is likely that one session a week will remain virtual albeit from the Centre on campus.

## Liverpool John Moores University

The Legal Advice Centre (LAC) based at Liverpool John Moores University moved to a wholly online service from October 2020, after the second lockdown began after the start of the first semester. The LAC worked closely with the University's Data Protection Officer, and in-house legal and governance team, to ensure they could set up robust home-working processes which would allow the clinic to continue service delivery, whilst safeguarding client confidentiality. The team of student volunteers worked on Microsoft Teams with their supervising solicitors, with clients joining either on video calls, or by telephone if they were not able to access Teams. Students have also volunteered remotely with the Support Through Court team based at Liverpool Civil and Family Court. Three full time solicitor staff joined the LAC and have worked entirely remotely throughout and have begun to conduct ongoing representation for clients in family and civil matters, including advocacy at telephone and video hearings with students preparing court documents and e-bundles.

The LAC also reported that *“the experience of remote working has certainly boosted the tech skills of students and staff alike. Nevertheless, our priority for the coming year will be to return to having a physical presence in our courts and communities, wherever possible, to make sure we reach those whose vulnerabilities may make the prospect of even a telephone call to seek legal help too daunting.”*

## University of Exeter Community Law Clinic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Exeter's Community Law Clinic moved from a face-to-face clinic one afternoon a week to a remote, online service, with appointments conducted through Zoom. Remote delivery has provided the unexpected opportunity of expanding capacity and improving the efficiency of the service. This has enabled the clinic to reach clients who would usually struggle to access a face-to-face service and offer them more flexible appointment times, including clients with disabilities, caring responsibilities, inflexible working schedules, and clients living in rural locations. Dealing with higher demand the remote service has enabled the clinic to identify and respond to the needs of the community, including the most vulnerable. Moving from a drop-in clinic, when it was not known who would come through the door, to electronic referrals, has also helped the clinic to more carefully triage enquiries to ensure clients are assisted or referred to services better suited to help. As a result, clients are receiving the most appropriate assistance in a timely manner, whilst also enabling the clinic to strengthen relationships with agencies throughout the south-west

## South Westminster Legal Advice Centre

Prior to the pandemic, the South Westminster Legal Advice Centre (SWLAC) was, like most clinics on the network, organised to give face-to-face advice and entirely paper-based. Last year, SWLAC was forced to set up a remote service, which was largely made possible by the volunteers' enthusiasm and ideas. The service turned to Intralinks, provided via LawWorks. Its simplicity saved them from having to spend hours providing tutorials to their lawyers. Volunteers are allocated a case by the supervising solicitor via email and able to access all relevant documents from home. Moving forward, SWLAC plans to provide laptops at their premises from which clients can speak to volunteers via Skype, since this can increase the number of available volunteers on any night. SWLAC's virtual service will now become permanent and is proving a very useful addition.

## Norfolk Community Law Service

The past year has brought unforeseen and extraordinary challenges which have hit particularly hard amongst the vulnerable client group Norfolk Community Law Service (NCLS) seeks to serve. NCLS moved immediately to remote working, equipping all staff with the IT they needed, and all services ran without pause adapting swiftly to the new ways of working in the pandemic. NCLS developed new protocols - online forms, investment in technology and an enhanced case management system are just some of the ways they kept things going. This included working remotely with all pro bono solicitors, law students and community volunteers (around 130 in all). NCLS maintained all services by delivering advice and support to clients by telephone or video calls, including continuing to support or represent them at remotely conducted tribunals and court hearings. NCLS have also been careful to look after the welfare of all staff and volunteers by effective team work and dedication.

A client reported *“As both myself and my daughter have been dealing with very separate law matters, I have wondered how we would have progressed without NCLS? A truly professional, caring and supportive set up that really exudes respect, warmth and commitment to the caller. I feel very lucky indeed privileged to have access to this fantastic service here in Norfolk. Great*



*job each and everyone of you and grateful thanks for all you do.” And a student volunteer fed back “...I have found the pandemic to be a massive learning curve for me when working for NCLS. Because I have been working remotely, this has encouraged me to ask more questions if I am unsure of something or even ask questions to enable me to further my skills to therefore become more of an asset to the team.”*

## Citizens Advice St Albans

Citizens Advice St Albans runs a weekly Honorary Legal Adviser (HLA) clinic. 13 local solicitors and barristers provide specialist advice in family, employment, personal injury, immigration and wills & probate law. This was a face-to-face service in the local Citizens Advice office - when lockdown was announced staff and most volunteers (including lawyers) transitioned to working from home, and by October 2020 the service was helping more clients than in the previous year. Citizens Advice St Albans have since recruited 28 more assessors who refer clients to the HLA clinic and retained all HLAs, gaining another employment barrister. Once the service has returned to the office, it will continue with some remote HLA advice sessions.

## United Legal Access

United Legal Access partnered with The Vine Community Centre in Nottingham to help make legal advice and assistance easily accessible during the pandemic to potential Windrush claimants in Nottingham. A successful funding application enabled the Centre to acquire tablet devices with internet access, so individuals without access to the internet at home could use the devices during their scheduled online triaging or fact-finding appointment with volunteer lawyers.

## Suffolk Law Centre

Suffolk Law Centre implemented a seamless transition to remote working at the start of lockdown, moving all face-to-face appointments to telephone, Zoom and Teams. The lockdown impacted on vulnerable people and the demand for the clinic service increased. With the flexibility and responsiveness of legal volunteers, they managed to keep waiting lists low. During this time Suffolk Law Centre have found a new way of working, where clinics now take place 2 evenings a week as well as during office hours, offering greater accessibility to clients.

## Harlow Law Clinic

Harlow Law clinic is based at Harlow Citizens Advice. Prior to the lockdown, the clinic offered a mixture of face-to-face and telephone appointments across 7 areas of law, where local solicitors would attend the clinic, or the client would attend the clinic and call the solicitor. When the first lockdown commenced, all the practitioners immediately agreed to deliver a remote telephone service on a monthly rota. The process is that clients await a call from a solicitor at a pre-arranged 30-minute appointment. The process went incredibly smoothly and the clinic are still using this model 15 months later.

# LawWorks support over the pandemic

LawWorks has continued to develop its support for clinics, reviewing and updating information and resources, publishing our monthly newsletter for clinics, and holding events for the network, including our annual clinics conference. In response to Covid-19, we developed new platforms and approaches to supporting clinics, including monthly online information exchanges and, in 2020, LawWorks launched an online forum for the clinics network. We published specific Covid-19 guidance for clinics, and a suite of practical resources on moving to an online/remote service, developing accessible services and supporting hard to reach communities, and undertaking risk assessments, alongside providing free access to tools such as case management software. We also published advice for solicitors volunteering whilst on furlough, and our training programme has been constantly developing with new sessions and content. All of our training and resources are now online and open to all.

Feedback over the period (from co-ordinators, volunteers and stakeholders) has been positive and encouraging. LawWorks have supported the development and launch of new pro bono clinics over the period of the pandemic as well as continuing to proactively support clinics to deliver their services remotely. We have also been providing ongoing support with data collection. To support clinics going forwards, LawWorks will be publishing a Pro Bono Clinics Manual which will serve as a reference document to support the development of pro bono clinics and consolidate a range of resources and guidance in one place.

# Conclusions

This report demonstrates the collective contribution of a diverse network of pro bono clinics, as illustrated by the numbers of people helped over the course of the pandemic. Clinics have faced exceptional challenges over the period and many have successfully pivoted towards remote delivery; however this has been smoother for some than others, with varying amounts of time needed to get to grips with technology and implement new procedures. The pandemic has continued to impact on the ability of some clinics to provide services remotely, but over 75% of clinics are now (i.e., as at early July 2021) providing advice.

Not unexpectedly, the number of enquiries recorded over 2020 was less than in previous years; this pattern is similar to trends reported in other advice organisations (e.g., Citizens Advice, Advice UK and Law Centres Network members),<sup>vi</sup> and digital exclusion issues have been highlighted as a challenge across the advice sector. Of concern to LawWorks, and the wider sector, are clients sometimes referred to as “the disappeared” – those who typically visited a face-to-face clinic, but who have not been accessing support remotely. Covid-19 has taken a heavy toll on individuals and communities, with continued unmet legal need and an expectation of greater need going forward (e.g., housing and repossessions, debt problems, family breakdown, access to benefits, etc). For this reason, we will continue to support clinics to provide in-person services (when safe to do so), but also encourage services to consider adapting to hybrid models that meet client need as closely as possible.

# Endnotes

- i [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/777038/post-implementation-review-of-part-1-of-laspo.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777038/post-implementation-review-of-part-1-of-laspo.pdf)
- ii See LawWorks’ response to the LAPSO Review (2018) <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/about-us/news/lawworks-submission-laspo-implementationreview>
- iii <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/solicitors-and-volunteers/resources/clinic-resources/monitoring-and-impact/client-outcomes>
- iv <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/policy-campaigns/campaigns/access-to-justice/end-legal-aid-deserts>
- v Citizens Advice employment stats and ACAS data both show a spike over March-May 2020
- vi <https://public.tableau.com/profile/citizensadvice#!/>

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](http://www.lawworks.org.uk)  
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