

SOAS Environmental Justice Clinic

**Advancing Innovative Legal Clinics
for Ecological Justice**



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Foreword from the Clinic Co-Coordinator

We would like to thank the students and representatives of our partner organisations who attended the workshop and contributed their time, experience and ideas. Their thoughtful reflections on the opportunities and challenges of clinical legal education helped shape the discussions and recommendations presented in this report. The workshop benefited greatly from their openness, practical insight and commitment to strengthening environmental legal education.

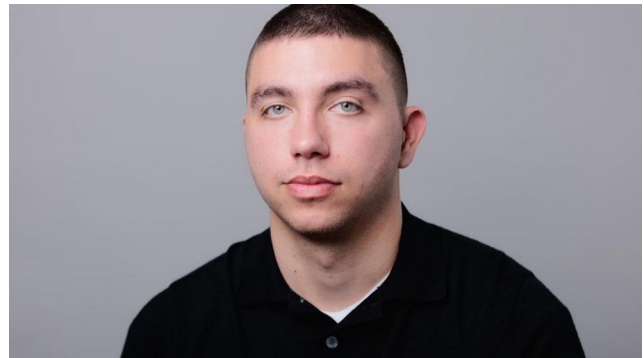
We are particularly grateful to Chlöe Jayne Prescott for her work in bringing together the workshop discussions and preparing this report. Her contribution has been invaluable in capturing the range of perspectives shared and identifying possible directions for the future development of the Clinic.

The workshop was generously funded by the Law School and Climate Crisis Fund, the Society of Legal Scholars, and the College of Law at SOAS University of London. We are grateful for their support in making this work possible.



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Introduction

The SOAS Environmental Justice Clinic was launched in September 2022 to give students opportunities to collaborate with environmental organisations, NGOs and activists. The Clinic has two complementary arms. Its policy clinic undertakes research projects for partner organisations, usually lasting between three and six months and often culminating in a report. Its legal advice clinic provides advice to community groups, individuals and organisations.

Since its launch, the Clinic has engaged more than 70 students and eight partner organisations. Its work has addressed environmental disputes, fossil fuel litigation, wildlife conservation, Rights of Nature and river rights at local, national and international levels.

In 2027/28, a new clinical module will formalise this work as a full-year, credit-bearing course for students on the LLM in Environmental Law and Sustainable Development.

Much of the Clinic's growth has happened organically through the work of students, staff and partners across individual projects. Until now, there has been limited opportunity to reflect collectively on that experience and consider its future direction. This report responds to that need by examining how the Clinic can strengthen clinical legal education, deepen its relationships with partner organisations, and pursue more radical and transformative approaches at a time of profound ecological change.

Developing Innovative Environmental Legal Clinics

In May 2026, SOAS University of London hosted a workshop to reflect on the Clinic's work to date, consider its impact and identify possible directions for its future development. The workshop brought together SOAS academics, including colleagues with experience both within and beyond the Clinic, as well as students and practitioners from environmental organisations. Many of the participating practitioners represented organisations that had previously worked with the Clinic.

The workshop had four broad aims:

- Identify the needs of stakeholders and partner organisations, including NGOs, charities and activist lawyers, and explore opportunities for collaboration with student clinics.
- Evaluate the Clinic's impact on students and partner organisations.
- Identify ways to broaden the Clinic's scope beyond its current areas of practice.
- Develop innovative approaches to teaching that can provide a transformative impact on students.

Opportunities and Challenges of Clinical Projects

Student, academic and practitioner responses emphasise that clinical legal education generates strong mutual value, deepening student learning, strengthening university-practice links, and giving practitioners research capacity and future talent. However, persistent challenges exist within clinical legal education, regarding aligning timelines, workloads and supervision capacity across the three groups, while safeguarding advice quality and project follow-through.

Practical learning

Opportunity: Students develop research, collaboration and professional skills by working on real environmental problems. Partner feedback also helps them understand how legal work is assessed and used in practice.

Challenge: Students must balance clinic commitments with academic deadlines. Longer projects can make sustained participation difficult, particularly when urgent client needs do not align with the academic calendar.

Collaboration and capacity

Opportunity: Clinics connect students and academics with practitioners, organisations and other universities. Students can bring fresh perspectives, comparative knowledge and research capacity to organisations with limited resources.

Challenge: Student involvement does not automatically reduce a partner's workload. Projects that require extensive revision or additional supervision can place further pressure on organisations.

Supervision and quality

Opportunity: Academic and practitioner supervision exposes students to professional standards, ethical questions and the practical demands of producing useful legal work.

Challenge: Reviewing research and legal advice is resource-intensive. The Clinic must ensure that every project has appropriate supervision and that work is checked before it is shared with partners or clients.

Expectations and continuity

Opportunity: Sustained relationships can enable the Clinic and its partners to build on previous work and develop longer-term collaborations.

Challenge: Students, supervisors and partners need a shared understanding of the project's scope, deadlines and expected outputs. Clear arrangements for communication, review and handover are essential when work continues across academic terms.

Participation and inclusion

Some international students expressed concern about participating in protest-related or activist activities because of possible consequences for their visas. The Clinic should recognise these concerns and provide different ways for students to participate in potential grassroots organising related work.

Priorities for Developing the Clinic

The workshop identified four priorities that could guide the Clinic's future development. These proposals require further discussion with students, partners and communities before being adopted.

Strengthen long-term partnerships

The Clinic could build relationships with partner organisations over several years, enabling each project to develop or apply earlier work. Longer-term partnerships could improve continuity, reduce the need to begin again with each student cohort and connect legal research with wider community action.

Combine legal knowledge with reflective learning

Clinical teaching should give students a strong grounding in black-letter law while encouraging them to question its assumptions and limitations. A reflective component could help students consider the relationship between technical legal work, environmental justice and more radical approaches to change.

The Clinic could also place greater emphasis on the confidence and interpersonal skills students need when working with clients, counsel and partner organisations.

Broaden participation

The Clinic should provide different ways for students to participate according to their experience, availability and circumstances. Rights education, including education about protest-related rights, could help students and communities make informed decisions about their involvement.

Deepen community engagement

Future work could be developed more closely with communities and grassroots organisations. Universities can provide space for outreach, education and experimentation, but community engagement should be based on mutual benefit and should not be undertaken by the Clinic in isolation.

Areas for Future Projects

Workshop participants also identified several subjects that the Clinic could explore through future student projects.

Rights of Nature

Possible work includes mapping organisations involved in Rights of Nature and connecting groups working through litigation, political engagement, education and community organising. Participants noted that coalition mapping can be valuable but requires considerable time and resources.

Climate justice and accountability

Future projects could examine corporate accountability for climate justice and climate transition, including due diligence obligations and the treatment of climate risk in business planning.

Displacement and Indigenous perspectives

The Clinic could explore legal frameworks affecting people displaced by climate change, including the potential use of human rights law. This work should recognise the distinct experiences of affected communities and incorporate Indigenous perspectives where relevant.

Law, policy and public engagement

Projects could examine routes beyond judicial review and consider how legal research can contribute to parliamentary debate, policy development and public understanding. This could include translating complex legal arguments into accessible messages for policymakers and communities.

Interdisciplinary work involving education, storytelling, arts and culture could support these aims, although it would require collaboration across departments and with external partners.

Conclusions

The workshop confirmed that the SOAS Environmental Justice Clinic creates significant value for students, academics and partner organisations. Students gain experience of applying legal knowledge to real environmental problems, while partners benefit from research, fresh perspectives and connections with future environmental lawyers. Academics also gain opportunities to connect teaching and research with practice.

The discussion also demonstrated that successful clinical work depends on careful design. Projects must reflect student availability, academic timetables, partner needs and the supervision required to produce reliable work. Clear expectations, realistic deadlines and effective arrangements for review and handover are essential. These foundations should be strengthened as the Clinic develops its new credit-bearing module.

The Clinic can build on its existing work through sustained partnerships, reflective teaching and deeper community engagement. Possible areas for future projects include Rights of Nature, corporate accountability, climate-related displacement, rights education and the relationship between legal research and political change.

The next stage should combine ambition with practical planning. Future initiatives should be developed with students, partner organisations and affected communities, with attention to available capacity and mutual benefit. Through this approach, the Clinic can provide rigorous legal education while supporting creative and transformative responses to the ecological crisis.