

SOAS Environmental Justice Clinic

Annual Report 2025/26

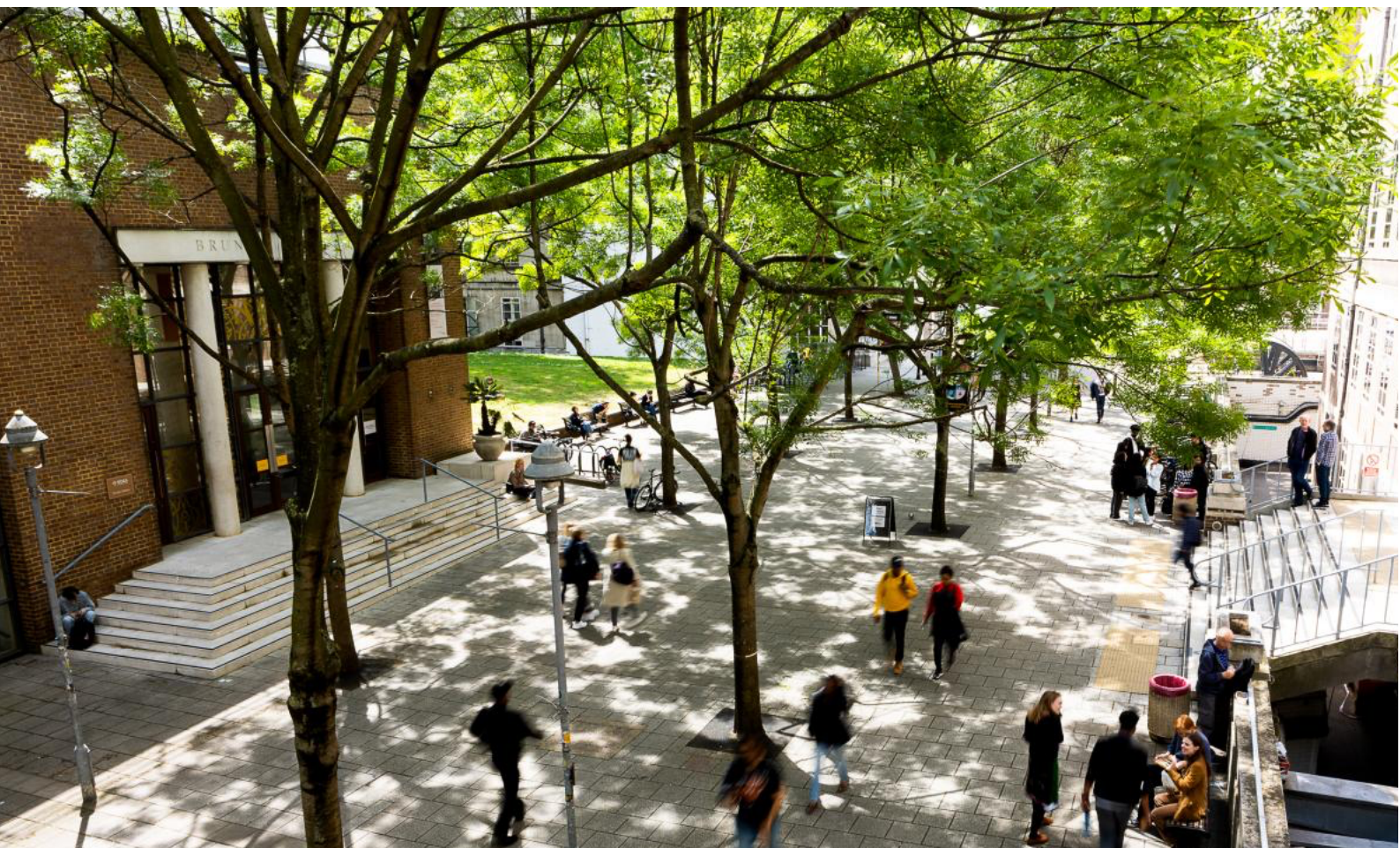


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Foreword from the Clinic Co-Coordinator

We are pleased to present the Annual Report of the SOAS Environmental Justice Clinic for 2025/26.

The Clinic, which was established in 2022/23, provides opportunities for collaboration among students, environmental organisations, NGOs, and legal practitioners. The Clinic has two complementary arms. The policy clinic undertakes research projects for partner organisations. Its legal advice clinic (ELAC, see page 10) provides legal advice to community groups and organisations. ELAC is coordinated by Professor Martin Lau.

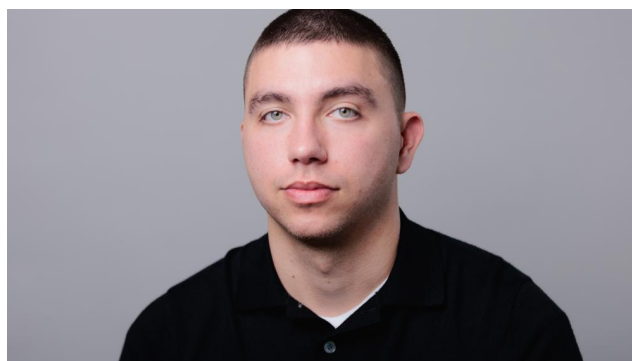
This year, we ran one legal clinic and five policy clinics on projects covering a range of topics, including the rights of nature, international climate change law, policy and ecological economics. Students engaged in doctrinal analysis, comparative research, institutional design and client-facing advice. They addressed questions central to environmental justice, including who speaks for nature, how communities can use law to protect their environments and how lawyers should respond to economic framings of the natural world. Students were also given opportunities to volunteer with organisations such as Legal Response International (LRI) during UN negotiations.

We are grateful to our partner, supervisors, the College of Law at SOAS, LEDC, and above all to our students.



Dr Birsha Ohdedar

Senior Lecturer in Environmental and Climate Change Law; Deputy Director of the Law Environment and Development Centre



Dr Nate Palmer

Lecturer in International Environmental Law; Lead on Experiential Learning and Engagement at the Law Environment and Development Centre

Testimonials from Partner Organisations & Students

"This was a great opportunity to work collaboratively with other students on a compelling report. I really enjoyed the chance to research an innovative area of environmental law and co-author a report to support new legal developments. I feel that working as part of a team within the Clinic has helped prepare me for post-graduate roles, giving me experience to learn from." **Tom, LLB student**

"The SOAS Environmental Law Clinic provided me with a thorough research paper on the topic I asked for. They also provided me with a well-grounded analysis which was extremely useful. I am already using this research for my work. I would say the students exceeded my expectations. I hope to continue engaging with the clinic." **Melinda Janki, Partner Organisation**

"The experience was particularly rewarding, as it allowed me to draw on what I had learned through my modules at SOAS while developing a deeper understanding of how legal frameworks can facilitate development in practice. I was also lucky to learn from my team members, whose expertise provided valuable insight into the practical dimensions of the project." **Danya, LLM student**

"We are delighted by the research presented by the students, who have done a very thorough job, their report on protected species is a valuable addition to ELF's ongoing work." **Tom Brenan, Environmental Law Foundation.**



London Intercollegiate Environmental Policy Clinic



Partner: Environmental Law Foundation

Team: Josie Butcher, Sarah Cooper, Julia Peetz, Hazal Pekdemir, Catalina Racovita, Kinjell Singh

Supervisor: Dr Nate Palmer; Dr Marie Petersmann

Participating institutions: SOAS, UCL, King's College London, LSE Law School, and Birkbeck, University of London

This intercollegiate Clinic project with the Environmental Law Foundation examined how the River Thames could be incorporated as a meaningful stakeholder within the Greater London Authority. The project responded to the ecological distress of the Thames and the fragmented system through which it is governed, involving the GLA, Environment Agency, Port of London Authority, Thames Water, London boroughs, and national planning frameworks. Students investigated whether the river could have a more direct voice in decision-making, rather than being managed by multiple bodies without one institution holding its wellbeing as a primary mandate.

The project focused on three possible routes. First, the Thames could be represented through the Mayoral team, either as a Deputy Mayor-style role or special mayoral appointment. Second, it could have a formal advisory role within or alongside the London Assembly Environment Committee. Third, it could be integrated as a stakeholder within existing strategies, including the London Plan, London Environment Strategy, and Swimmable Rivers work. The team concluded that strategy-based integration is likely the most feasible first step, while more ambitious routes could offer greater visibility and influence.

Practitioners' Guide: The Potential for Nature (Land)

"Owning Itself" in the United Kingdom



Partner: Lawyers for Nature

Team: Lina Zeitoun, Beatrice Stuart Fisher, Flavia Russo, Tom Crumbie, Jeffrey Cheung

Supervisors: Dr Nate Palmer; Miguel Camilo Cuba Pinto

This Clinic project with Lawyers for Nature explored whether land could “own itself” within the United Kingdom. The project responded to growing interest in eco-centred governance, Rights of Nature, and alternative landholding structures that challenge the treatment of land as an object of ownership, control, and exploitation. Students prepared a practitioners’ guide examining how land might be reconceptualised as a subject of law, or at least governed through legal structures that prioritise ecological integrity and long-term flourishing.

The project first analysed the instrumentalization of property, showing how dominant ownership models legitimise environmental harm, fragment accountability, and marginalise relational and place-based understandings of land. It then examined comparative models, including Thomas Linzey’s “land that owns itself” framework, Rights of Nature easements, nature-based corporate governance, and broader Rights of Nature governance. The team also assessed English land law, including legal and equitable ownership, Crown ownership, bona vacantia, trusts, charitable trusts, and conservation covenants. The report concluded that English law does not presently allow land literally to own itself, because land lacks legal personality. However, charitable trusts, conservation covenants, and purpose-driven stewardship structures may approximate some of its aims.

Supporting Climate Negotiations at COP30



Partner: Legal Response International

Team: Antonio Alvarez Martin, Juliette D'Erm, Abhijit Kujur, Chloe Prescott, Inigo Chancellor, Roman Collier

Supervisor: Dr Birsha Ohdedar

Legal Response International is a UK-based charity that provides free legal support to developing countries and civil society observer organisations on climate change law, particularly in relation to international climate change law.

The Clinic team provided support during the UN COP30 negotiations in Belem, Brazil. The Clinic team provided legal research and assistance on the work of the Adaptation Fund, which informed the COP30 negotiations and will be relevant to LRIs' work ahead of future negotiations. In addition, the Clinic team volunteered in the "situation room", the pro bono legal advice hub that LRI operates from London during COP negotiations, which provided on-the-spot legal research and assistance to LRI team members during the negotiations.

Policy and Regulatory Framework for Moroccan Offshore Wind Development



Partner: Global Fields

Team: Allegra Speri, Danya Andrea Novak, Niloofar Haeri, Aisling Alexandra McBurney, Isaac Kasoka

Supervisor: Marta Simonetti

The group worked with the Globalfields team between October and December 2025 to draft a policy report on Moroccan offshore wind. The report provided a review of Morocco's renewable energy policy, with a focus on offshore wind, and compared Morocco's approach with those of leading European markets. It covered a review of the policy framework, regulatory developments, major projects and actors in the wind market, financing structures, and considerations for future offshore wind development. The potential for future developments was also considered, along with critical physical conditions in Morocco, including seabed depth, grid development, and interconnectedness with European markets.

While the country is making significant strides in renewable energy, especially wind and solar, with a clear policy direction and growing private-sector equity and debt investment, a potential next phase of offshore wind development will require further regulatory clarity, clear government plans for investment in grid connections and port infrastructure, studies of seabed characteristics and wind yield potential in nearshore locations, and collaboration with European leaders in technology and supply chain management to realise its full potential.

Exploring Natural Capital in Law

Partner: Melinda Janki, Lawyer protecting life and vital ecosystems in Guyana & across the planet

Team: Liam Gray, Engin Polar, Isabella Anciutti, Barbara Dirrheimer, Kakoly Pandé

Supervisor: Dr Birsha Ohdedar

Melinda Janki is a Guyanese international lawyer who leads litigation challenging oil and gas exploitation, protecting the natural environment, and defending indigenous rights. In 2023, she received the Commonwealth Lawyers Association Rule of Law Award.

In assisting with her ongoing work in this field, the clinic team were commissioned to write a report on the concept of 'natural capital' in law. In recent years, the concept of natural capital has emerged, often with a more economic understanding of the environment. Natural capital refers to the environment as a stock of natural 'assets', such as water, air, soils, and ecological communities, that generate a flow of goods and services supporting human wellbeing (often referred to as ecosystem services). Its importance for law and environmental justice lies in its use in legislation, which gives the state responsibility to steward or protect the stock of natural capital. The task of the clinic was to analyse its emergence in different jurisdictions around the world and the ways courts and legislators have dealt with the concept. While the term has recently been used by ecological economists and policymakers, its use and interpretations in legal instruments are less certain. Therefore, this report mapped how the field interprets natural capital, examining cases from South America (in particular Brazil), Asia (particularly the Philippines and Indonesia), as well as New Zealand, and the potential opportunities and challenges with the term for lawyers and environmental legal activists.

Environmental Law Advice Clinic (ELAC)



Partner: Environmental Law Foundation

Team: Harendra Beniwal, Labiba Rukhsana, Olivia Hall, Asra Alsaadi, Ruqayyah Omar Geloo, Alesha Anees, Paul Ofusu-Asare, Ahmed Muaz, H. Erem Elmaci

Supervisor: Professor Martin Lau

During the clinic, the Environmental Law Advice Clinic (ELAC) handled cases through the Environmental Law Foundation (ELF). ELAC handled two client matters concerning environmental issues affecting local communities. The cases raised questions relating to pollution, environmental nuisance, regulatory compliance, and the responsibilities of public authorities and private operators. The work involved conducting detailed legal research, analysing the relevant legal and regulatory framework, reviewing supporting evidence, and considering the legal remedies and practical options available to the clients. The outcome of the clinic was the preparation of detailed legal advice for both clients. One advice letter has been completed and reviewed by external counsel instructed by ELF, and arrangements are being made to communicate the advice to the client. The second piece of advice is at an advanced stage and is currently awaiting some additional information from the client before it can be finalised. Through this process, we assessed the applicable legal framework, identified potential avenues for action, and provided practical guidance tailored to each matter.

Acknowledgements

The SOAS Environmental Justice Clinic thanks its partner organisations for this year, including the Environmental Law Foundation, Lawyers for Nature, Melinda Janki, and Legal Response International, for entrusting their work to our students and for the time and care they invested in each project. We are grateful to the project supervisors, to colleagues at the participating London institutions who made the intercollegiate Clinic possible, and to the Law, Environment and Development Centre at SOAS for its continuing support. We are also grateful to Dr Clara Della Croce, Director of Clinical Education and Professor Eddie Bruce-Jones, Head of College of Law, for their continued support for environmental law clinical education

Above all, we thank the students of the 2025/26 Clinic cohort. Their work, described in this report, reflects the seriousness, rigour, and commitment to environmental justice that the Clinic exists to foster.