

**The International Human Rights Clinic
at the SOAS School of Law
2019-2020**

Convenor: Professor Lynn Welchman

Introduction for Project Partners

The International Human Rights Clinic at SOAS was launched in the academic session 2007-2008 and is running for the tenth time in the academic year 2019-2020 with an anticipated class of twenty students from both the LLM and the MA Law programmes at the SOAS School of Law. Students participating are normally expected to have a familiarity with international law / human rights law, or to be acquiring such familiarity through other Law School modules. For organisational Project Partners, the Clinic provides a resource of highly motivated postgraduate student researchers and advocates drawing on the extensive research facilities of the School and the wider University of London. For SOAS students, the Clinic provides a dynamic and critical environment in which to engage with advocacy strategies and the tensions of the theory and practice of human rights, and the opportunity to contribute to the work of the international human rights movement through practical work with cases, policy analysis, and research briefs. Students take the Clinic as a full credit module (30 credits) within the taught post-graduate law programme offered by the SOAS Law School, in the international human rights specialism. In the academic year 2018-19, Professor Lynn Welchman was joint winner of the SOAS Director's Award for Inspirational Teaching for her work convening the Clinic.

Prior to the commencement of the academic year in late September, Project Partners complete a guided brief to describe the project and develop with the Clinic convenor the parameters for the project work in which the student team will be engaged. Experience has shown that precise clarification of the research questions, fact-finding (desk-based) and advocacy goals of particular projects significantly augments both the outcome of the project and its utility to our institutional partners, and the learning experience of students. Project Partners are asked to identify deadlines for progressive drafts of the project work through the course of the first term and until final submission at the end of January. Project Partners are also asked to propose mechanisms of regular communication with and feedback to the student team through the period October-January in order to facilitate development of the project work and agree any adjustments to the brief that appear to become necessary. Finally: there are limits to the amount of time Clinic student teams may be expected to devote to their Project work. Full time postgraduate students are studying for the equivalent of three other full credit taught modules at the same time as their work on Clinic projects. Project Partners are expected to bear this in mind in their design of the project, and to be prepared to adjust the brief, in discussion with the convenor and with their Clinic team, should it transpire during the progress of the project that the work load is or has become unexpectedly disproportionate.

Students at the Clinic work in small teams (usually four per project) on the research and advocacy briefs from early October (Term 1) through to the end of January in Term 2. Team-work is integral to the concept of the Clinic; as well as their substantive work, students are encouraged to develop effective team-working modalities and to reflect on the challenges of cooperative endeavour in human rights related work. Students are assigned to their project teams by the Clinic convenor with a view to creating teams with a mix of interests, previous experience and qualifications and (where relevant) language abilities. Project teams are constituted in the second week of October; a briefing in a full meeting with the project partner is expected as soon as possible thereafter so that work on the project can begin. Student teams are asked to submit their completed project document to the Project Partner by the end of January so that they have time to complete separate module requirement purposes. Project work is assessed individually; the Project Partner is not involved in the assessment although very welcome to provide feedback on the project work of the team with which they work. The preparation of the Project Portfolio provides an important objective for students to work towards and space for reflection on the engagement with the Project Partner and the project team, as well as on the methodology and substance of the particular assignment. The end of January deadline for submission of the final project document to the Project Partner needs to be understood in light of the students' obligations to meet this part of their module assessment.

Clinic teams have worked on briefs from, *inter alia*, Amnesty International, the Redress Trust (London), al-Haq (Ramallah), the Welfare Association (Jerusalem), the ICJ (Geneva), DC-Cam (Cambodia), ASK (Dhaka), CIHRS (Cairo), Just Fair, Lawyers for Justice in Libya, Legal Action Worldwide, IHRB (London) and Terre des Hommes. Areas addressed in particular project work have included domestic violence legislation, the protection of cultural property, the right to water, violence against women, the impact of austerity measures in Europe on economic and social rights, corporal punishment, human rights and public health emergencies, universal jurisdiction, corporate social responsibility, emergency legislation, freedom of expression and disability rights. In their project work, Clinic teams are briefed by partners but supervised by SOAS academic staff, and they conduct their work at SOAS, unless exceptionally they are required to work *in situ* by partner institutions. Supervision at SOAS is provided by the Clinic convenor, Professor Lynn Welchman, in collaboration with Dr Lutz Oette and with other Law School colleagues available to give expert input into particular areas of research. Some completed Clinic projects, comprising "stand-alone" research briefs, have been separately published, while the input of others has been acknowledged in documents subsequently published by the partner organisations. Some Project Partners find it helpful to schedule a final presentation and discussion session with the SOAS student team and members of their own organisational team after submission of the final project document.

The Clinic is structured around project work and the weekly seminar. The seminar addresses a range of issues in human rights advocacy, strategies and challenges. London-based Project Partners are invited to address the seminar to

discuss their own work and introduce the project to the Clinic as a whole. The learning outcomes identified for the Clinic students include that the student acquires an understanding of the rigours and challenges involved in international human rights practice and be equipped to research and write on this area; understand the dynamics of team work; be able to conduct research, individually and in teams, on case-specific themes and country situations, through a variety of media and sources, including web-based resources; understand, and be able to analyse, the application of international human rights instruments in and to specific situations; and be able to reflect constructively on the dynamics involved in building and sustaining relationships with partners in a variety of countries and situations. Both students and partners who work with the International Human Rights Clinic are critical to the establishment of the concept of the Clinic at SOAS, to the development of its approaches to project work and to the strengthening of the Clinic's contribution to the human rights efforts of its partners. The SOAS Clinic has a home page at the School of Law: see <https://www.soas.ac.uk/human-rights-law/international-humanrights-clinic/>.