



Published date: 08 July 2026

Reviewed Article

Learning beyond the classroom walls: Assessing the Value of Community Engagement through participation in a Street Law Project

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the value of using community engagement projects as a learning tool for participating law students. Although small-scale, this study contributes a useful perspective at the intersection of community engagement, public legal education, and Street Law teaching and learning pedagogy. This article presents data gathered over two academic years (2022-2023 and 2023-2024) from students enrolled on a Street Law module at Lancaster University Law School. The study aims to assess the learning and value for students who participate in community engagement, specifically by working with members of the public through a Street Law project. The study explores insights from participating students which show how researching, designing and delivering Street Law presentations for the public has enhanced their engagement, work ethic, skills development, legal knowledge, employability and the ability to see law in action.

Keywords: Street Law; community engagement; skills; engagement; employability.

Introduction

Universities are increasingly using their research, scholarship and teaching to engage with the public. Community engagement in higher education can be described as a range of activities delivered by university staff and/or students that address a community's social, economic and political needs¹ and can be used to help 'evolve, shape, and progress higher education for the benefit of local, national and international communities.'² Student community engagement involves students working on projects locally within a community setting. Engagement can take many forms, including volunteering, community-based research projects, professional practice placements, training or through a teaching module.³

Whilst community engagement can add real value in supporting community development, this article aims to explore the value of using community engagement projects as a learning tool for participating law students. Specifically, participation in student community engagement is set into context in this article through consideration of a 'Street Law' module delivered at Lancaster University Law School.

¹ Maria Aurora Correa Bernardo, Jude Butcher, Peter Howard, 'An international comparison of community engagement in higher education' (2012) 32(1) *International Journal of Educational Development* 187-192

² *Ibid*, 191

³ Juliet Millican & Tom Bourner, 'Student-community engagement and the changing role and context of higher education' (2011) 53(2/3) *Education and Training* 89-99.

Street Law is a Public Legal Education ('PLE') community engagement programme where law students research, design and deliver interactive presentations to members of the public, including school pupils, in order to provide education about legal rights and responsibilities.⁴ Despite rich anecdotal evidence suggesting that participating in Street Law projects is an effective learning approach for law students, it remains the case that there is a relatively small, and still evolving, academic body of evaluative literature which has aimed to assess the effectiveness for students of engaging in Street Law programmes.⁵ This article offers a unique perspective by attempting to fill this gap in the evidence.

Although small-scale, this study contributes a useful perspective at the intersection of community engagement, public legal education, and Street Law teaching and learning pedagogy. This article presents data gathered over two academic years (2022-2023 and 2023-2024) from students enrolled on a Street Law module at Lancaster University Law School. The study aims to assess the learning and value for students who participate in community engagement, specifically by working with members of the public through a Street Law project. The study explores insights from participating students which show how researching, designing and delivering Street Law presentations for the public has enhanced their engagement, work ethic, skills development, legal knowledge, employability and ability to see law in action.

The findings indicate that there is a wealth of learning benefits for law students who partake in community engagement via Street Law programmes, that students would not be afforded in the 'traditional' law classroom.

Part 1 of this article considers the current literature regarding community engagement and the known benefits of Street Law projects. Part 2 of the article discusses how Street Law is offered as an optional third year and postgraduate law module at Lancaster University Law School. Part 3 details the research methodology used in this study, with Part 4 presenting and discussing the findings.

Part 1 - Literature Review

a) Why participate in community engagement?

Broadly, there are three underpinning goals for any higher education provider. Millican and Bourner note that this tripartite mission for universities involves:

- (1) the advancement of knowledge;*
- (2) the provision of higher education; and*
- (3) service to the wider community (i.e. beyond the walls of the campus).⁶*

Service by higher education providers to the wider community through community engagement can take numerous forms.

⁴ See for example: Sean Arthurs, Melinda Cooperman, Jessica Freda Grealy, John Lunney, Robb Mars and Richard Roe, 'Zero to 60: Building Belief, Capacity and Community in Street Law Instructors in One Weekend' (2017) 24(2) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 118-241. See also: Richard Grimes, Ed O'Brien, David McQuoid-Mason and Judy Zimmer, 'Street Law and Social Justice Education' in Frank Bloch, *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Change*, (OUP, 2011)

⁵ For discussion see: Brandon Golob, 'Student in the Seats, Teachers in the Streets: Evaluating the impact of Law Students Becoming 'Street Law' Teachers' (2021) 5(1) *International Journal of Public Legal Education* 37-93, 40. See also: Richard Grimes, 'Evaluating legal literacy programmes – aims, challenges, models and a call for action' (2018) 2(1) *International Journal of Public Legal Education* 28, 29.

⁶ Millican (n 3), 90

Mulligan and Nadarajah define community engagement as:

*'...the process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest and/or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those groups of people. Discussion of the notion of community engagement suggests that its aim must be the empowerment of individuals and community-based organizations...'*⁷

Universities have many reasons for working closely with the communities they serve.⁸ Firstly, engagement activities can offer numerous benefits to the community. Bernardo et al. argue that Universities have a moral obligation to the community to provide scholarship, research and leadership for the benefit of the public.⁹ This can be through knowledge transfer, knowledge exchange, arranging volunteering opportunities for the community interest or to improve quality of life.¹⁰

Secondly, engagement can offer reputational benefits to the University itself. For instance, Millican and Bourner argue that when universities offer student community engagement projects, this can also be attractive to potential applicants to a university by adding value to campus-centred study for students.¹¹ Some academics argue that there is an acceleration of expectation placed upon universities where they are expected to produce students who are socially aware and socially responsible, creating graduates who will be able to tackle the problems faced by an ever-complex world.¹² It is suggested that creating community engagement projects can assist Universities in achieving this aim.¹³

Thirdly, it is not just the community and the university itself that can benefit from higher education community engagement projects. Research suggests that it is beneficial for students to take their learning outside of the traditional classroom. For instance, Nicotera et al.'s research found that providing students with experiences which took them outside the comfort of the academic classroom acts as a transformative learning experience. For students participating in community engagement Nicotera argues that this '...developed broader perspectives about the relationship between the issues they read about in books and articles and the lived experiences of community members'.¹⁴ It has also been argued that community engagement provides students with opportunities to problem-solve, and engage in "deep learning" pedagogies such as critical thinking and social participation.¹⁵

Millican and Bourner argue that 'Student community engagement adds a dimension to university education that may otherwise be limited to the pursuit of knowledge and understating of an academic subject'.¹⁶ Instead, it is suggested that community engagement allows students to develop a sense of social concern, civic responsibility and community participation.¹⁷ Additionally, the value of community engagement has been noted as a way to broaden the horizons of students as they learn more about the world outside of universities, enhance self-efficacy and the feeling of being able to

⁷ M. Mulligan, & Y. Nadarajah (2008), 'Working on the sustainability of local communities with a "community-engaged" research methodology'. (2008) 13(2) Local Environment, 81,87

⁸ For discussion see: Judith A. Ramaley Why do we Engage in Engagement? (2001) 12(3) in Metropolitan Universities, published by the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, Towson University.

⁹ Bernardo (n 1),187

¹⁰ James R. Cook & Maury Nation, 'Community engagement: Universities' roles in building communities and strengthening democracy' (2016) 47(5) Community Development 718-731

¹¹ Millican (n 3) 89

¹² Millican (n 3), 98

¹³ Ibid, 98

¹⁴ Nicole Nicotera, Nick Cutforth, Eric Fretz, and Sheila Summers Thompson, 'Dedication to Community Engagement: A Higher Education Conundrum?' (2011) 4(1) Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship 1-13, 5

¹⁵ See literature review in: Kristine Mason OConnor, Kenny Lynch, David Owen, 'Student-community engagement and the development of graduate attributes', (2011) 53(2/3) Education & Training 100-115

¹⁶ Millican (n 3), 91

¹⁷ Ibid, 91

make a difference, develop employability skills, improve academic performance, and gain greater reflective skills whereby students understand their own strengths and weaknesses.¹⁸

b) The Street Law approach

‘Street Law’,¹⁹ is described by Grimes et al. as ‘...a vehicle through which the public can be made more aware of their rights and responsibilities’.²⁰ Street Law was founded in 1972 when a group of Georgetown University students decided to offer lessons about the law to high school pupils in Washington DC, delivered through a series of practical and interactive lessons. Due to the practical nature and relevance of the lessons, these were dubbed ‘Street Law’ by the participating high school students.²¹ The lessons grew in popularity and gained traction with other universities and high schools rolling out the programme.²² Today, Street Law is estimated to be the fastest growing, and most popular, type of clinical legal education programme globally.²³ Street Law has grown to such an extent that it is delivered in approximately 100 universities in the USA, in over 40 countries across the world²⁴ and in 60% of law schools in the UK.²⁵

The aims of Street Law are noted in the current literature as being two-fold. First, Street Law aims to benefit the community by offering education about legal rights and responsibilities free of charge. Second, Street Law aims to benefit the students delivering the Street Law lessons by providing opportunities to deliver interactive presentations to the public and develop their skill set.²⁶

McQuoid-Mason suggests that all Street Law presentations have six common features:

1. Street Law presentations must be *relevant* to the audience
2. Explain *legal content*
3. A discussion of *policy considerations*
4. Inclusion of discussions about *conflicting or competing values*
5. *Interactive* teaching strategies should be adopted; and
6. *Practical* information should be given.²⁷

Often delivered by university law students, Street Law is a method of participating in community engagement through delivering Public Legal Education (‘PLE’) to the local community and to school children. Grimes describes PLE as working with communities to provide “an awareness of the law and

¹⁸ Ibid, 91

¹⁹ Street Law TM is the property of Street Law Inc of Washington DC, USA <<https://www.streetlaw.org/>> accessed April 2025.

²⁰ Richard Grimes, David McQuoid Mason, Ed O’Brien and Judy Zimmer ‘Street Law and Social Justice Education’ in Frank Bloch, *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice*. (OUP, 2011)

²¹ Lee Arbetman, ‘Street Law, Inc.: Context, History and Future’ (2018) 2(1) *International Journal of Public Legal Education* 3-27

²² There are several articles which detail the history of Street Law, so they will not be replicated in this article. For useful historical background of Street Law, see: Lee Arbetman, ‘Street Law, Inc.: Context, History and Future’ (2018) 2(1) *International Journal of Public Legal Education* 3-27

²³ Sean Arthurs, Melinda Cooperman, Jessica Freda Grealy, John Lunney, Robb Mars and Richard Roe, ‘Zero to 60: Building Belief, Capacity and Community in Street Law Instructors in One Weekend’ (2017) 24(2) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 118-241.

²⁴ Arbetman (n 21), 3-27

²⁵ Ben Perdue and Amy Wallace, ‘Preparing Lawyers for Practice: Developing Cultural Competency, Communication Skills, and Content Knowledge through Street Law Programs’ (2021) *Journal of Legal Education* 95-124

²⁶ See for example: Richard Grimes ‘How was it for you (and how was it for them)? Learning by doing, the Street Law way’ (2001) 151(6968) *New Law Journal* 87. See also: Richard Grimes, ‘The (book) case of learning by doing’ (2002) 152(7051) *New Law Journal* 1516.

²⁷ David McQuoid-Mason, ‘Street Law and Public Legal Education: A Collection of Best Practices from around the world in honour of Ed O’Brien’ (Juta & Company Ltd, 2019)

the legal process, [so that they have] an ability to use that awareness in addressing problems or issues and to realise when help may be needed or where to go for assistance.”²⁸ Grealy et al. suggest that ‘PLE is closely aligned to access to justice and encouraging the public to increase their confidence and empower them to deal with law-related issues’.²⁹ The idea being that by increasing a community’s legal literacy levels, people begin to have more awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities.³⁰

For school children, PLE also has an important function. Arthurs’ research found, amongst other things, that high-school students who had received and participated in Street Law lessons had enhanced critical thinking skills, with improvements in their ability to interpret, assess and evaluate evidence and arguments.³¹ Arthurs argues that:

‘Effective civic education engages and involves students in civic life and prepares them to be invested and active citizens. Effective civic education gives students a voice and empowers them...Effective civic education is also one of the best platforms to teach students the 21st Century Skills they will need to work together to solve tomorrow’s problems.’³²

c) The known effectiveness of Street Law in Enhancing Student Skill Development

There is an evolving, yet relatively small, academic body of literature which has aimed to assess the effectiveness of Street Law for the students who design and deliver the presentations. Grimes et al. note that Street Law provides the ‘benefit of hands-on education’³³ and that ‘Law students not only learn the relevant substantive law and related procedures, but also address innovative teaching strategies to prepare, develop, and deliver their Street Law classes’.³⁴

A study by Perdue and Wallace et al. which received 63 responses from Street Law students from across six countries (USA, Ireland, UK, Czech Republic, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan) found that:

‘Street Law provides significant and often unique benefits for law students, including developing vital cultural competency skills, practicing legal communication with non-lawyers, and cementing content knowledge in a non-academic environment.’³⁵

Perdue, Wallace and others found that ‘cultural capital’ came from engaging with the community, and seeing how law applies outside of the classroom, noting:

‘Street Law gives law students a real and tangible way to interact with their community. By moving beyond the theory and formality of the law school environment and connecting law students with a diverse set of young people....Designing Street Law lessons gives students the

²⁸ Richard Grimes, ‘Public Legal Education: The Role of Law Schools in Building a More Legally Literate Society’ (Taylor & Francis Group, 2021) p3.

²⁹ For a helpful summary of ‘What is public legal education?’ see: Freda Grealy, Steve Collender, John Lunney and Rory O’Boyle ‘Education, Empowerment and Access to All - Public Legal Education and Massive Open Online Courses at the Law Society of Ireland’ (2019) 3(1) International Journal of Public Legal Education 3, 6.

³⁰ See: Richard Grimes, ‘Evaluating legal literacy programmes – aims, challenges, models and a call to action’ (2018) 2(1) International Journal of Public Legal Education 28.

³¹ Sean G. Arthurs, ‘Street Law: Creating Tomorrow’s Citizens Today’ (2015) 19(1) Lewis & Clark L Rev 925

³² Ibid, 960

³³ Richard Grimes, Ed O’Brien, David McQuoid-Mason and Judy Zimmer, ‘Street Law and Social Justice Education’ in Frank Bloch, The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Change, (OUP, 2011) 225, 228

³⁴ Ibid, 230

³⁵ Ben Perdue and Amy Wallace, ‘Preparing Lawyers for Practice: Developing Cultural Competency, Communication Skills, and Content Knowledge through Street Law Programs’ (2021) Journal of Legal Education 95, 96

opportunity to think critically...about the law, the societal context that gave rise to our legal system, and their own role within this legal system'.³⁶

Other findings from Perdue, Wallace and others' study are that students considered that Street Law programmes provided them with a valuable and unique preparation for a career within the legal profession, with skills enhancements in explaining legal topics to lay audiences, public speaking, building legal knowledge, research, and the development of community connections.³⁷

A small-scale study by Bracken found that law students participating in a Street Law programme at the University of Limerick were more confident in their legal skills following completion of the project. Improvements were noted in time management, research skills, presentation skills, the ability to simplify legal language for a non-legal audience, and enhanced confidence in their own skills.³⁸

Similar skill-development benefits of participating in Street Law were found in a study by Draslarova.³⁹ After receiving 103 responses from students who had engaged in the Street Law programme at Charles University in Prague, research by Draslarova found that Street Law can act as an efficient tool for enhancing skills that are beneficial for legal practice. This includes improved ability to transfer legal information to a non-lawyer (with 60% of students in the study identifying they had improved this skill, and another 34% of students noting that it is 'likely yes' that this improved) and presentation skills (with 60% of students identifying they had improved this skill, and another 35% of students noting that it is 'likely yes' that this improved). In addition, Draslarova found that Street Law has the potential to deepen and extend a student's legal knowledge and enhance a student's values, noting 'the extra value of the Street Law course is that students can reflect on law as a system, its social function, professional responsibility of lawyers and the relationship between law and non-lawyers.'⁴⁰

Golob's research, which surveyed 49 law students from across 10 law schools in the USA, found, amongst other things, that Street Law has positive effects on how students approach their learning, including improving retention of legal material; providing students with practical lawyering experiences; reminding law students that learning is enjoyable; redefining success in both academic and professional environments; development of soft skills, including effective lawyering skills; and the ability to see the world through the eyes of others.⁴¹

The evolving literature therefore suggests that there is a wealth of benefits for students participating in Street Law projects, but it can be argued that more evidence is needed to support the hypothesis that specifically working with, and for the benefit of the public, through a student community engagement project has learning benefits for the students involved. It should be noted however that the study in this article has focused directly on the students' perceptions of the value of community engagement for their own learning. Future research would be needed to make a comparison with students who study a law degree without completing any public legal education or community engagement, to determine fully the contribution of community engagement activity to the enhancement of a student's learning and legal capabilities.

³⁶ Sean Arthurs, Melinda Cooperman, Jessica Gallagher, Freda Grealy, John Lunney, Rob Marrs & Richard Roe, 'Is it possible to go from Zero to 60? An evaluation of one effort to build Belief, Capacity, and Community in Street Law Instructors in One Weekend'. (2017) 1(1) International Journal of Public Legal Education 19-81, 27

³⁷ Perdue (n 25), 95-124

³⁸ Lydia Bracken 'A case study on the impact of a capstone Street Law teaching project' (2022) 56(2) The Law Teacher 206, 216

³⁹ Hana Draslarova 'Street Law as a unique learning method: What do students themselves actually find to be its benefits? Answers from the Czech Republic' (2019) 3(1) International Journal of Public Legal Education 123

⁴⁰ Ibid, 137

⁴¹ Brandon Golob, 'Student in the Seats, Teachers in the Streets: Evaluating the impact of Law Students Becoming 'Street Law' Teachers' (2021) 5(1) International Journal of Public Legal Education 37-93, 54

Part 2 - How is Street Law delivered at Lancaster University?

Street Law is offered at Lancaster University Law School as both a third-year undergraduate, and a postgraduate, optional assessed module which takes place across two 10-week terms. The module allows students, working in teams (group sizes are generally between 3-4 students), to research an area of law that they are often unfamiliar with. They use this research to design talks, lessons or podcasts with the aim of educating the public about legal rights and responsibilities.

The Street Law module at Lancaster University is structured so that students research, design and deliver Street Law lessons to school pupils in the first term. The lessons are aimed at Year 9 pupils (aged between 13-14 years) and are delivered to approximately 30 pupils in each class. The topics are selected by the school and fit within the school's Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum.⁴² Examples of topics that have been delivered in the past include knife crime, drugs and the law, social media and the law, human rights, and how the English legal system works.

Despite the topics being chosen by the school, the content and format of the lessons is created by the students, following a period of training (discussed later in this article). As a team, students decide how to structure the lesson, how to construct the lesson plan, what content to incorporate, how to make the session interactive, and how to distribute the roles between themselves. Students are educated about 'teaching' approaches that are useful for community members. Examples include creating learner-centred classrooms and creating learning activities that utilise active learning approaches (discussed in detail below). Learner-centred classrooms, where the school pupils receiving the Street Law lessons are placed at the heart of the activities delivered, rather than purely focusing on the student delivering the lesson, are noted as a way of engaging participants. Through developing learner-centred experiences and activities, it is argued that the school pupils gain more knowledge and are better able to apply that knowledge to new contexts, which is needed in the Street Law context as community participants take the knowledge they have learned and apply it to their own circumstances.⁴³ Students also receive training on adapting legal jargon for a non-law audience, which is particularly important so that the community members can understand and potentially apply the legal knowledge learned to their own circumstances.

Although students are given an element of freedom over the content of sessions, they need to ensure that the material is relevant to the audience.⁴⁴ Lessons last for 45 minutes and are entirely student-led. However, a teacher from the school does remain in the class with the student group for classroom management purposes.

In term two, students either engage in a community-based presentation (such as to a community group or charity) or design a podcast to deliver public legal education on a wider scale.⁴⁵

Preparation of students

Prior to designing their Street Law lessons, students participate in a series of training sessions. All activities that are delivered in the Street Law training sessions have been designed to require the students to work in teams and actively participate. Active learning in basic terms is when a student

⁴² Department for Education, 'Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE- education)' at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe/personal-social-health-and-economic-pshe-education> accessed April 2025

⁴³ Mostrom and Blumberg, 'Does learning-centered teaching promote grade improvement?' (2012) 37(5) *Innovative Higher Education* 397-415

⁴⁴ For ways to help students achieve this, see the helpful teaching resources in: Frances Ridout and Linden Thomas 'Street Law Theory and Practice (Hart Publishing, 2023) 77

⁴⁵ Lancaster University Law School 'Street Law Series Podcasts' accessed via Spotify on: <https://open.spotify.com/show/4YtmlldHRYGV73QolynoPd>

participates in their learning and does more than listening.⁴⁶ This is important as research suggests that when students actively participate in their own learning, there is a shift from teachers simply transmitting information to the students, and instead students engage in activities in order to develop their skills, knowledge and critical thinking skills.⁴⁷ Active participation is also at the heart of Street Law pedagogy with Grimes noting that ‘Engagement in Street Law means participation, not listening to lectures’.⁴⁸

Placing students in teams to design their Street Law projects is a strategic pedagogical choice due to the wealth of educational benefits teamwork offers. In order to assist the students with working in a team, students receive training on what makes a good, and conversely a poor, team. Lancaster University Film Production has created a series of videos which can be accessed via YouTube, which show examples of good and poor teamwork⁴⁹. These videos are readily available and are used to facilitate class discussion on the advantages of teamwork, but also the difficulties that can arise and how these difficulties can be remedied. They are made by students, for students.

Working in teams not only allows for active participation, but affords students opportunities to discuss ideas, share creativity, seek peer feedback and develop a sense of community.⁵⁰ There are common themes throughout existing literature that teamwork enhances inter-personal skills, communication skills, negotiation, conflict-resolution, decision-making, time management and problem-solving skills.⁵¹

It can be argued that these skills are difficult to develop in lectures and higher education structures more generally, where the focus is traditionally on didactic approaches and passive learning.⁵² However, by offering students the opportunity to engage in teamwork as part of their learning experience, there is often a shift from the teacher-centred learning in ‘traditional’ law teaching towards student-centred learning,⁵³ with students being encouraged to participate as independent learners and gaining ‘autonomy’ over their work.⁵⁴ Autonomy in learning creates the notion of deep learning which ‘...is almost universally recognised as the goal of educational practice in Higher Education’.⁵⁵ Campbell argues that ‘Deep learning encourages active participation, promotes autonomous learning and allows dynamic formation of knowledge and understanding.’⁵⁶ With this in mind, when designing their lessons for delivery to the school children, students also ensure that the activities they create employ active learning strategies and encourage the pupils to work in teams.

⁴⁶ G.F. Hess ‘Seven Principles for Good Practice in Legal Education’ (1999) *Journal of Legal Education* 367, 401

⁴⁷ Rohan Havelock ‘Law studies and active learning: friends not foes’ (2013) 47 (3) *The Law Teacher* 382, 385

⁴⁸ Richard Grimes, Ed O’Brien, David McQuoid-Mason and Judy Zimmer, ‘Street Law and Social Justice Education’ in Frank Bloch, *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Change*, (OUP, 2011) 225, 227

⁴⁹ A series of YouTube video designed by ‘Lancaster University Film Production’ offers useful resources for teamwork. <https://youtu.be/0-mjq9FHT3Y?list=PLdv1ZOL_9gD0uxX5oAWBBSelfr9r4skn8>accessed January 2026

⁵⁰ Sean Arthurs, Melinda Cooperman, Jessica Gallagher, Freda Grealy, John Lunney, Rob Marrs & Richard Roe, ‘Is it possible to go from Zero to 60? An evaluation of one effort to build Belief, Capacity, and Community in Street Law Instructors in One Weekend’. (2017) 1(1) *International Journal of Public Legal Education* 19-81

⁵¹ See for example: Elspeth Berry ‘Group work and assessment—benefit or burden?’ (2007) 41(1) *The Law Teacher* 19-36. See also: Sue Prince & Elisabeth Dunne ‘Group development: The integration of skills into law’ (1998) 32(1) *The Law Teacher* 64-78. And see: Sandra Clarke & Michael Blissenden, ‘Assessing student group work: is there a right way to do it?’ (2013) 47(3) *The Law Teacher* 368-381.

⁵² Havelock (n 47) 382-403

⁵³ Elaine Campbell ‘Transferring Power: A Reflective Exploration of Authentic Student-Centred Small Group Work in Clinical Legal Education’ (2015) 22(2) *Internal Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 1-31

⁵⁴ Elspeth Berry ‘Group work and assessment—benefit or burden?’ (2007) 41(1) *The Law Teacher* 19, 32

⁵⁵ Campbell (n 51), 1

⁵⁶ Campbell (n 51) 1

At the start of the module, students receive skills-based training in the following key elements:

- The Street Law methodology;
- The importance of PLE;
- Designing a lesson, including how to create a lesson plan, how to make lessons interactive and classroom management;
- Public speaking and communication skills;
- How to ‘translate’ legal language for a non-law audience;
- A research refresher;⁵⁷
- Reflection and reflective writing; and
- Teamwork.

Formative Feedback

Throughout the module, high levels of formative feedback are given to the student teams when designing their lessons. Formative feedback is the process of monitoring the development of student learning, whilst also offering support for that learning.⁵⁸ In the module, ‘student-led formative feedback’ meetings are used and occur weekly with the tutor.⁵⁹ Each week students rotate to be the ‘leader’ of the team. The leader is tasked with keeping the team ‘on track’ that week with the development of their presentation resources, and for submitting the team’s work in advance of the meeting with the tutor. This allows the tutor time to supervise the Street Law lesson design in advance of meeting with the students. During the meetings students can identify any areas with which they feel they need tutor support or guidance.

The aims of the ‘student-led formative feedback’ meetings are fourfold. Firstly, formative feedback is noted as one of the most useful ways of improving student learning and development in Higher Education.⁶⁰ This method encourages students to be independent learners, with guidance rather than control offered by the tutor. Secondly, due to a different student being allocated the role of team leader each week, students gain experience of leadership. This is important, as learning how to be a leader is not often covered in a traditional law curriculum but is important for employability.⁶¹ Thirdly, tutors can ensure that the content of the presentations being prepared can be used by the public, reassured in the knowledge that it is accurate, it has been supervised and that it has been designed and created to a high standard. Fourthly, the tutor can also use the process to monitor team dynamics, ensuring that all students are participating and contributing equally.

Prior to delivery in the school setting, students also engage in a rehearsal presentation where the tutor provides further formative feedback. Delivering a presentation to members of the public will be an

⁵⁷ We invite the University’s Law Librarian to deliver a refresher training session for the students. The students should already be familiar with how to conduct legal research; however, we encourage the Street Law students to also engage with ‘practitioner’ type research databases. We use Lexis PSL and Thomson Reuters ‘Practical Law’ as these are often used within law firms and therefore provide the students with some ‘workplace’ experience. These resources also offer some practical examples of how the law can be applied to everyday scenarios.

⁵⁸ P. Black & D. William ‘Assessment and classroom learning’. (1998) 5(1) *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice* 7-74

⁵⁹ Francesca Jackson, Nadia Patel & Kathryn Saban ‘Showcasing Street Law: The importance of students and staff working in partnership to provide and receive formative feedback’ (2025) 9(1) *International Journal for Students as Partners* 251-260

⁶⁰ A. Irons, ‘Enhancing Learning through Formative Assessment and Feedback’ (Routledge: New York, 2007).

⁶¹D. Polden, ‘Educating law students for leadership roles and responsibilities’. (2007) 39(1) *University of Toledo Law Review*, 353–360.

unfamiliar form of assessment for most (if not all) students who are studying this module. Providing formative feedback is essential to ensure that students feel comfortable and prepared for the delivery of the lesson in the school and for their summative assessment, discussed below.

The day of delivery

On the day of delivery, students travel to the school to present the lesson in the classroom setting. Whilst good communication links are kept with the school throughout the Street Law lesson design process, students have not visited the school previously, so there is an element of the students needing to be able to adapt and think on their feet. This often comes in the form of making adaptations to the material based on the layout of the classroom, the technology available on the day or the level of engagement from the pupils that are in the classroom.

The importance of interaction

To promote school pupil engagement, the Street Law lessons and talks are delivered by the students in an interactive way and encourage audience participation. Students can use their creativity to design ways of making the law engaging, fun, interactive, yet remaining informative. For example, students have previously designed interactive activities such as scenarios, problem-based questions, worksheets, role-plays, mini mock trials, games, videos, negotiations, debates, plenaries and quizzes. In the past, students have even delivered a full school lesson using the format of a TV gameshow or have used the lyrics in music to emphasise key legal concepts. At the end of the lesson, students collect feedback from the school pupils and from the schoolteacher. Feedback is collected about the usefulness of the activities designed, rather than how the students themselves performed.⁶² The feedback is not used for assessment purposes but does aid the students with reflecting on their experiences.

Assessment

Students on the module are assessed by way of a presentation and a portfolio. The presentation assessment focuses on the student's skills in public speaking and communication. The portfolio consists of the work completed throughout the project such as a research report, a reflective journal documenting the student's learning throughout the module and an evidence section, which includes all the resources the student has individually prepared. The idea behind this is that each student needs to be able to show that they have contributed to the progress, development and creativity of the resources used within the school. Although students work on the project as a team, individual grades are given for the work produced. This is essential so that students remain responsible for their own section of the work, alleviating any risk of students acting as a 'passenger' within the group environment.

Quality not quantity

Each academic year, the number of students enrolled on the Street Law module is small. For instance, in the academic year 2022/23 there were 22 students (15 undergraduate and 7 postgraduate) and in 2023/24 there were 12 students (11 undergraduate and 1 postgraduate). Students are required to apply for the module, due to the limited number of spaces on the module and to ensure that they have grasped the requirements and professional responsibilities of producing work for the benefit of the public. Places are limited as there is only one member of academic staff convening and teaching on the module, and there are currently only a set number of classes to present to (approximately seven different lessons are delivered to around 210 Year 9 pupils each academic year).⁶³

⁶² We considered that it would be inappropriate to ask school pupils to comment on the delivery/public speaking skills of the students involved, but instead they are asked to comment on what they learned, and which activities were helpful. The schoolteacher, however, often provides feedback to the students about what worked well with the class. The Street Law tutor is also present in all school sessions, so can provide feedback about performance.

⁶³ This could be scaled up; however, it would need a greater level of staff input.

Part 3 - Methodology

This research study received ethical approval from Lancaster University's faculty ethical research committee. The study aimed to explore the value for participating students in engaging in a Street Law module, specifically with reference to the benefits, if any, of community engagement as a learning mechanism. This article reports on data collected over two academic years, with two different Street Law cohorts (participating students from the 2022/2023 cohort and the 2023/2024 cohort).

In the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24, the author invited students from the Street Law modules to complete an online *Qualtrics* survey. The survey was distributed to students via email. All participants were self-selecting, and they provided informed consent to take part in the study. Before agreeing to participate in the study, students were made aware that the responses provided would be anonymous and no identifying data would be collected. In addition, it was expressly made clear to the students that the process was voluntary, and their involvement (or non-involvement) would have no bearing on their academic grades.

The surveys were distributed to the students after term one, once the students had presented in the schools. They were not distributed at the end of the module as students in the academic year groups who were surveyed opted to complete a podcast in term two rather than an in-person presentation. The focus of this study included the value of presenting to the public in a face-to-face setting and therefore it was important to capture the results immediately after term one.

The research methodology was designed to focus on the students' views, opinions and their own perceived benefits of participating in community engagement through Street Law. This is particularly important as insights into matters such as level of engagement, work ethic, and perceptions of one's own confidence in skills development can only be ascertained from the students themselves.

Questionnaires were used as they allowed the students to provide anonymous responses and they are known to be useful when researchers are attempting to consider overall patterns amongst respondents, where willing respondents can be relatively easily identified and where the researchers have sufficient insight at the start of the project in order to write meaningful questions in the survey itself.⁶⁴ This was the case for this project.

Of the 34 students who participated in the Street Law module across both academic years in 2022/23 and 2023/2024, fourteen respondents completed the survey fully (a 41% response rate). However, the survey allowed respondents to complete some sections and not others. Questions relating to community engagement drew thirteen responses (a 38% response rate). Only students who had presented externally could complete the elements of the survey relating to the community engagement due to the nature of the questions asked.

Limitations of the study

It is suggested that the findings from this study will help to enrich the research and scholarship relating to Street Law and will contribute to the discussion about the beneficial effect of community engagement, specifically relating to participating in a Street Law module. Whilst it is not possible to state with any certainty that the experiences highlighted within this study will be generalised across Law Schools and experienced nationally and internationally, links can be drawn between this research and projects that have come before it (please see discussion below for details).

⁶⁴ We used the guidance in Jenny Rowley 'Designing and using Research Questionnaires' (2014) 37(3) Management Research News 308

It is recognised that the survey sample size is small and is gathered from one Law School. This is partly due to the nature of the small size of the Street Law module.⁶⁵ It is also acknowledged that the voluntary nature of completing the survey may have also led to some of the students with more positive views about the Street Law module taking the time to complete the survey. It is also acknowledged that data has only been gathered from the students themselves. However, for this project this was intentional, as the project focuses on the perceived benefits for students when they work on community engagement projects. Also, by collecting data (both quantitative and qualitative) from two separate cohorts, over two academic years, stronger patterns have emerged. The data collected therefore contributes to an emerging field of work to assist with the improvement and evaluation of clinical programmes, specifically relating to public legal education.

Part 4 - Findings & Discussion

a) Learning benefits associated with community engagement

Students were provided with a series of statements about their views on the perceived learning benefits from participating in community engagement and were asked to rate their responses using a 5-point Likert scale of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'.

The findings in this section of the study show that participating students considered that by designing and delivering a project specifically aimed at benefitting the public, this led to increased engagement in the module, increased work ethic and provided students with a valuable learning experience.

Engagement:

Students were asked to rate themselves against the statement: 'Knowing that my work was to be presented to the public increased my engagement with the Street Law module'. This yielded entirely positive responses. 84.62% of responses (11 students) stated that they 'strongly agreed' with this statement with the remaining 15.38% (2 students) stating that they 'agreed'. Student engagement can be described as 'the extent to which students are engaging in a range of educational activities that research has shown as likely to lead to high quality learning'.⁶⁶ Students engagement is essential in Higher Education as it helps with productive learning, academic attainment and retention of students.⁶⁷ It is therefore noteworthy that community engagement, particularly through Street Law, can have a positive effect on a student's engagement within a project. The results here suggest that by working on community engagement projects, this leads to students increasing their level of engagement with a module.

Delivering the presentation to the public:

Students were asked to consider the following statement: 'Delivering a presentation to members of the public was a valuable learning experience'. 100% of students who answered (13 students) stated that they 'strongly agreed' with this statement. This is an overwhelmingly positive finding, particularly considering research suggesting that University students often find oral communication skills challenging, particularly in the context of delivering presentations.⁶⁸

Traditionally, oral assessment and the delivery of presentations have not featured prominently in the undergraduate law degree, with the written essay being favoured as the main mode of assessment. This may be because it has been argued that 'academics and the [legal] profession alike might see

⁶⁵ It should be noted that it is not unusual for Street Law projects and research to be small in scale.

⁶⁶ See Hamish Coates, 'The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance' (2005) 11(1) *Quality in Higher Education*, 25-36, 25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 25-36

⁶⁸ R. Grieve, J. Woodley, S.E. Hunt, & A. McKay, 'Student fears of oral presentations and public speaking in higher education: a qualitative survey'. (2021) 45(9), *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 1281–1293.

written skills as the ‘gold standard’ in terms of academic rigour’.⁶⁹ It has also been noted in the literature that students find delivering presentations difficult. Research conducted by Grieves and others suggested that students experience high levels of anxiety, particularly social anxiety, in university learning situations, particularly when they are asked to participate in any form of public speaking. Grieves and others note that students experience the fear of being judged when speaking out loud, and can be concerned about physical symptoms from their nerves associated with public speaking, such as going red, sweating or shaking when asked to speak.⁷⁰ Additionally, research by Russell and Cahill-O’Callaghan found that whilst students do recognise the value of discussion, speaking in class and oral presentations, many students did not enjoy the experience, with a lack of confidence creating a barrier to participation.⁷¹

However, it is pleasing to see that this study suggests that students do find the process of delivering a presentation, particularly to members of the public, as being a valuable learning experience, and, as demonstrated in the discussion below (see Knowledge & Skills Development), as a way to develop their key social and interpersonal skills. This would suggest that students should be afforded opportunities to deliver presentations (in any format, but in this context particularly to external agencies and members of the public). This skill is likely not only to serve students well in their studies but also in their future employment. For instance, several studies have highlighted the importance and value that employers place on oral communication skills in graduates. Archer and Davison, for example, found that communication skills were the most highly prized skill by employers when recruiting graduates.⁷² However, current academic literature suggests that there remain concerns that law graduates are not sufficiently prepared for graduate employment, including the legal profession.⁷³ Some academics suggest that this might be due to law assessments placing too much weight on the skill of writing essays alone rather than also promoting oral communication skills, such as presentation delivery.⁷⁴ Affording students opportunities to participate in community engagement, specifically by delivering a presentation, could assist with alleviating this issue, at least in part.

Designing the project:

By way of a comparison, interestingly, there were more mixed responses to the statement ‘Designing a project which benefitted members of the public improved my learning.’ Whilst the responses remained entirely positive, only 69.23% (9 students) ‘strongly agreed’ with this statement and the remaining 30.77% (4 students) ‘agreed’. This could suggest that whilst students considered the act of delivering the presentation to the public a valuable learning experience, the designing of the project for the public benefit, whilst still perceived in a beneficial light, was rated less strongly as an effective learning tool by the students. Students were not asked for their reasons here; however, it may be that the gravity of standing in front of a live audience adds a greater level of pressure for the students to be prepared and know the material that they are delivering. Consequently, this may lead students to

⁶⁹ Chloe J. Wallace, ‘Using oral assessment in law: opportunities and challenges’ (2010) 44(3) *The Law Teacher* 365, 366

⁷⁰ Grieve (n 68), 1281–1293.

⁷¹ Roseanne Russell & Rachel Cahill-O’Callaghan ‘Speaking in the classroom: the impact of gender and affective responses on oral participation’ (2015) 49(1) *The Law Teacher* 60-72. See also: See L Clouder and J. Toms ‘Impact of oral assessment in physiotherapy students’ learning in practice’ (2008) 24(1) *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice* 29-42 which suggests that dialogue during oral assessments can increase student anxiety.

⁷² William Archer and Jess Davidson ‘Graduate employability: what do employers think and want?’ (2008) *The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) London*, p7.

⁷³ Jenny Knox and Melanie Stone ‘Embedding employability skills for the legal professionals of the future’ (2019) 53(1) *The Law Teacher* 90-101

⁷⁴ Chloe J. Wallace ‘Using oral assessment in law: opportunities and challenges’ 44(3) (2010) *The Law Teacher* 365-377, 366.

perceive that the delivery of the presentation is a more valuable learning experience than the design of the material presented.

Work Ethic:

The students were asked to rate themselves based upon the following statement: 'Knowing that my work was to be presented to the public made me work hard in the Street Law module'. The responses to this statement suggest that creating a project for the public had a positive effect on the students' work ethic on the module. 92.31% of responses (12 students) stated that they 'strongly agreed' with this statement and 7.69% (1 student) opted for 'agree'. It is important to note that the students were not given a definition of what 'working hard' means, so it has been left somewhat to them to define their own interpretation of 'working hard' i.e. for them to compare their work ethic on the Street Law module, versus how they work on their other law modules.

It could be argued from these findings that the fact the students prepare work for an external source places additional requirements on the students to 'work hard' on the module. The students on a Street Law module are aware that they are creating a project in order to educate the public about their legal rights and responsibilities. They are also aware of the importance of ensuring its accuracy so that the public can rely on the resources prepared. In addition, they know that they must stand in front of a live audience and deliver the material prepared. They have a definite deadline, as they must ensure that all their work is completed to a high standard by the date set by the school for the delivery of the lesson. This 'pressure' therefore appears to be correlating with the effort put into the module by the participating students.

b) Knowledge and Skills development

Students were given a series of statements about whether participating in community engagement through presenting to the public had a perceived positive effect on their legal knowledge and their skills development. Responses from students demonstrate that preparing a project for the community has perceived benefits both in terms of advancements in legal knowledge and in skill development.

Knowledge:

Students were asked to consider the statement: 'delivering a presentation to the public has developed my understanding of the law'. This yielded entirely positive results. 75% of students (9 students) stated that they 'strongly agreed' with this statement and 25% (3 students) stated that they 'agreed'. In seeking to understand this positive response, the author surmises that being required to teach law to school pupils incentivised students to have a good knowledge of the relevant legal topics so that they could explain them clearly and answer pupils' questions appropriately. In addition, students had been tasked with researching the relevant area of law and were required to use their research to design the lessons accordingly.⁷⁵ Through this process, their understanding and knowledge of the law has developed.

Skills:

The students were given a series of statements regarding the development of various legal skills. Students were asked to rate themselves based upon the following statement: 'Delivering a presentation to the public has...' Table A, below, shows the responses given by the students. It should be noted that none of the students selected Likert scale responses of 'neither agree nor disagree' 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' and therefore these have not been represented on the table below.

⁷⁵ See David Duran, 'Learning by teaching. Evidence and implications as a pedagogical mechanism.' (2016) 54(5) *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 476 for an explanatory framework for 'learning-by-teaching' and a review of relevant empirical studies.

Table A: Responses by students to the statement: ‘Delivering a presentation to the public has...’

	Strongly Agree	Agree
a) ‘...developed my communication skills’	92.31% (12 students)	7.69% (1 student)
b) ‘...enhanced my ability to translate legal language for a non-law audience’.	84.62% (11 students)	15.38% (2 students)
c) ‘...developed my teamwork skills’.	83.33% (10 students)	8.33% (1 student)
d) ‘...developed my legal research skills’.	61.54% (8 students)	38.46% (5 students)
e) ‘...increased my confidence’.	69.23% (9 students)	30.77% (4 students)
f) ‘...developed my employability skills’.	83.33% (10 students)	16.67% (2 students)

These results suggest that by engaging in community engagement the Street Law students in this study had been afforded an opportunity to develop useful lawyering and employability skills.

Communication & Translation of Legal Language:

The fact that students have highlighted such positive responses in both communication skills and translating legal language for a non-law audience is possibly an unsurprising finding, as previous research suggests that Street Law programmes help students to cultivate the skill of communicating complex legal issues to people in the community who are not necessarily familiar with such concepts. For instance, Golob’s research found that students who participate in Street Law gained increased confidence in explaining legal concepts for a non-law audience, compared with law students who did not participate in Street Law.⁷⁶

Students receive high levels of training during the module in relation to these skills and are given opportunities to practice and rehearse their presentations before delivery in the school. As part of this, formative feedback is offered to the students about ways in which they can ensure that they are ‘translating’ their language appropriately for the Year 9 audience. An emphasis on communication, public speaking and translating legal language also features in the fact that the students participating in this study are assessed on their presentation skills, and therefore it could be suggested that this an area of skill development that the students decide to focus heavily upon.

Students also receive some informal feedback from the school’s teacher following the lessons regarding how they perceive the lesson went in order to aid with their reflections. The schoolteachers involved were not, however, surveyed as part of this study. External input would be advantageous for future research.

Teamwork:

Positive responses are also seen in respect of the development of teamwork. Working in a small team week after week towards a common goal to produce a Street Law lesson for school pupils appears to have been a useful learning experience. Working in teams is a useful learning strategy, as students need to communicate with one another, listen to each other’s ideas and engage with leadership and delegation to share the workload.

⁷⁶ Golob (n 41) 65. See also discussion in: R. Roe ‘Street Law Clinics at Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, D.C., and Others. ‘The Education Pipeline to the Professions: Programs That Work to Increase Diversity.

This study therefore concurs with much of the academic literature that confirms that providing opportunities for teamwork allows for a useful learning experience. For instance, although not Street Law focused, Clarke and Blissenden advocate that teamwork allows for greater autonomy for student learning and ultimately a deeper learning experience:

*'Students are able to have greater autonomy over their education and subsequently their learning outcomes; there are greater opportunities for a deeper generic or soft skill development; greater opportunities for active and interactive learning of the substantive content; and peer tutoring which enables students to learn in a way not usually dealt with in the classroom context.'*⁷⁷

Legal Research:

Advances were also noted by the students in terms of their legal research skills. For this, students are encouraged to engage with traditional legal research databases, but also to use practitioner focused databases.⁷⁸ In this sense, the aim is twofold. Firstly, to give students the benefit of how they might research if they enter the legal profession and secondly, to adapt the law in theory to a practical and real-life setting, including adapting complex legal concepts for community members of different ages and within different socioeconomic and cultural contexts. This means that the students must make the law relevant and understandable to the audience receiving the Street Law presentation.

Confidence:

It is extremely positive that students considered that engagement in Street Law had improved confidence levels. The author suggests that this could be because students work in small groups, get to know their peers well and are afforded numerous opportunities throughout the module to practice and hone their skills. Students also usually receive very positive feedback from the school children that they work with, therefore gaining a feeling of success. Thereby, it could be suggested that all these factors in turn improve their confidence levels. It would be interesting for the theme of 'confidence' to be further explored in future studies.

c) Community Engagement - Qualitative Responses

Students were asked to answer open-ended questions as part of the survey, to capture further insight and gain qualitative data. Students were asked to reflect on their views about whether it is important for the public to be educated about their legal rights and responsibilities. All students who answered this section of the survey (14 students) considered that it was. The responses received from the students largely focused on three key areas (1) for the law to offer 'protection' to members of the public, (2) to alleviate problems caused by cuts to legal aid and (3) to make law accessible.

Several of the students commented that it was important for the public to be made aware of their legal rights and responsibilities so that the law could afford the public 'protection', with the suggestion from students that an increase in legal knowledge could prevent people facing injustice. For example, one student noted: 'It is incredibly important that people are aware of their rights; knowledge of these gives you power to protect yourself against any unfair treatment'. Another stated: 'It is important as it creates an understanding of the legal system and helps to prevent injustices stemming from an absence of knowledge' and a third student reflected, 'Having legal knowledge can help members of

⁷⁷ Sandra Clarke & Michael Blissenden, 'Assessing student group work: is there a right way to do it?' (2013) 47(3) *The Law Teacher* 368, 372.

⁷⁸ As detailed earlier in the article, Law students engage with 'practitioner' type research databases such as Lexis PSL and Thomson Reuters 'Practical Law' as these are often used within law firms and therefore provide the students with some 'workplace' experience.

the public become more aware of their rights which can help them avoid cases of legal injustice'. The ideas raised in the student responses link in with the global aims of Street Law, that by delivering lessons to the community 'Street law helps people to understand how the law works and how it can protect them'.⁷⁹

Students also focused on the importance of the public being legally literate in the face of cuts in legal aid system.⁸⁰ In England and Wales, the introduction of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 has been described as 'devastating the legal aid system'.⁸¹ This has resulted in people not being able to gain publicly funded legal advice, an increased number of litigants in person, and law centres closing down.⁸² Participating students learn about the legal aid system in the first year of their law degree, and so it is interesting that this idea is still prevalent for the students in their third year and postgraduate studies. For example, one student noted, 'Free legal aid is sparse, and many people wouldn't know how to access it anyway' with another student commenting: 'cuts to legal aid mean many people are denied free access to a lot of legal information'. These views are not novel to this study, with research conducted by Ashton also noting that the students involved in her project acknowledged the importance of the work they had completed due to helping the community, particularly considering legal aid cuts. Ashton noted that her students were 'aware of the disconnect between legal education and the legal profession and many communities, particularly with funding cuts to legal aid and charitable services in recent years'.⁸³

Legal aid cuts are usually not a focus of term one's project, where the presentation is delivered to school children, but the topic does feature strongly for term two projects which involve presentations to the community and legal podcasts. It is likely that at the time of the completing the survey the students were beginning to think about their second Street Law project, where the impact of legal aid cuts could be seen more drastically, and therefore this has influenced their responses. Again, these ideas link in with the global aims of Street Law which is to offer free legal information and improve legal literacy for the community.

Other students acknowledged the role that Street Law plays in making law accessible, with one student offering a particularly interesting insight 'I think it's fairly common for people to think of law as elitist and inaccessible, I think streetlaw aids the community to change that opinion and get them engaged'. This is a particularly important role of Street Law for the community given that research by the Law Society found that only 1 in 5 members of the community consider that they can access to justice.⁸⁴ It can also be said that the student responses suggest that by engaging in community engagement projects, students are given an opportunity to see how the legal system impacts people in everyday life, outside of the classroom walls.

⁷⁹ David McQuoid-Mason 'Street Law as a Clinical Program: The South African Experience with Particular Reference to the University of KwaZulu-Natal' (2008) 17(1) Griffith Law Review, 27-51, 27

⁸⁰ The Law Society, 'LASPO Act' (January 2025) <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/legal-aid/laspo-act> accessed April 2025

⁸¹ The Law Society 'A decade of cuts: Legal aid in tatters' (March 2023) <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/a-decade-of-cuts-legal-aid-in-tatters> accessed April 2025

⁸² The Law Society 'A decade of cuts: Legal aid in tatters' (March 2023) <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/a-decade-of-cuts-legal-aid-in-tatters> accessed April 2025

⁸³ Jeanette Ashton 'Streetlaw at Sussex One Year On: Where did we come from, How Far Did We Get and where are we going?' (2024) 31(2) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education 32, 60

⁸⁴ The Law Society, 'Only one in five believes they can access justice' (August 2024) <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/only-one-in-five-believes-they-can-access-justice> accessed April 2025

d) Should law students deliver PLE?

All students who answered this section of the survey considered that law students should deliver PLE (13 students). It should be noted, however, that the delivery of PLE is not a requirement for completion of a law degree or the vocational stage of legal training in England and Wales (for example, before entering into the legal profession). For those students who do not select Street Law as an optional module, or any other similar clinical legal education module, the reality is that they will miss out on this important learning opportunity. For this section of the survey, students identified the dual function of the Street Law learning model, which aims to benefit both the student and the community. One student noted:

'I think it [is] important for the law students themselves to deliver public education, because for me from a personal perspective it enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the law as I translated legal terms into language that was accessible for the relevant audience...it is also beneficial to the community to be able to access this free information in an understandable and engaging way.'

Other themes which emerged from the students' qualitative responses are detailed below.

Skills development:

Qualitative responses echoed those derived from the quantitative responses gained in this study. Respondents noted that offering public legal education to the community has enhanced their skills: 'it develops confidence and the ability to speak to other people' and 'it's benefiting [...] law students themselves by developing their public speaking and teamwork skills'.

Students linked the enhancement of their skill development with the skills they would need for their future employability. For instance, students commented, 'law students above all can use this as an opportunity to develop their interpersonal skills which is key in the profession' and 'Law students should be able to convey information to non-legal [audiences] as it is inevitable in the future that they will have clients who lack specialist knowledge'. Students stated that the fact they had worked with the community '...looks good to employers' and 'develops skills which are otherwise for many untouched. These skills are necessary for a successful career in any sector' with a third noting that delivering PLE'[s]eems to be the best way for people to learn...with crucial skills that they might need later in their education and career'.

The idea that Street Law projects can help with students developing their future employability skills is not novel to this study. Similar themes were identified in Ashton's research who noted that her students had identified developments in presentation skills, written and oral communication, teamwork and research and '...were able to link these skills to their future career paths'.⁸⁵ The competitive nature of the legal profession, coupled with an increasing number of law graduates entering the employment market, places pressure on universities to produce graduates who have the skills, attributes, and experiences to make them 'industry ready'.⁸⁶ Through responses gained in this study, it would appear that students place weight on their employability being improved through participating in community engagement projects such as Street Law.

To fill gaps in a 'traditional' legal education?

One student commented:

⁸⁵ Ashton (n 83) 60-61

⁸⁶ For discussion see: Jill Alexander and Carol Boothby, 'Stakeholder Perceptions of Clinical Legal Education within an Employability Context' (2018) 25(3) International Journal of Clinical Legal Education 53, 59. Also see: Andrew Francis, 'Legal education, social mobility, and employability: possible selves, curriculum intervention, and the role of legal work experience' (2015) 42 Journal of Law and Society 173, 174.

'I think it [Street Law] builds skills that are often left out of traditional legal education. For instance, most forms of assessment are essays and exams, which are important but do not help develop key skills like teamwork, public speaking, and practical legal research. So, [...] delivering public legal education [...] helps [students'] personal development and provides a deeper insight into how law works outside the classroom environment.'

Another student reflected, 'A mixture of theory and practical based learning is much more beneficial than merely just theory alone, it gives a taste of what working in the field of law is like.' For Law Schools, it is not a novel idea that they should assist students with cultivating professional lawyering skills to prepare for legal practice.⁸⁷ Whilst there has been an increased drive to enhance legal education over recent years through teaching and learning activities that are practical and promote active learning, it can be argued that modes of teaching and assessment in law remain overwhelmingly essay-based. For example, legal education has seen positive improvements with the growth in clinical legal education⁸⁸ and 'authentic' learning which focuses on learning being beneficial for the workplace⁸⁹ but there is still a sense that law graduates are not well enough prepared to enter the labour market.⁹⁰ By engaging in community engagement, it could be suggested that students are developing some of the skills needed when seeking graduate employment. This is particularly important as graduates want to enter the working world feeling equipped with the skills needed to thrive. However, the leap between undergraduate study to the demands of graduate employment, even taking account of the intervening vocational stage of training,⁹¹ is significant, with some academics suggesting that there is often a disconnect between the legal content taught on a law degree and the skills that are needed to succeed in graduate employment.⁹² By allowing students opportunities to learn beyond the classroom walls, it can be suggested that this allows students to prepare for skills and experiences they will need beyond their law degree.

To understand how law impacts the world outside of the classroom:

Students recognised the learning value of seeing how law operates outside of the university classroom. One student recognised that 'it gives them [students] an insight into the importance of PLE for the community', a second noted '[i]t's a great opportunity to teach about law whilst also understanding the law from a different perspective and putting it into real-life context' and a third student considered 'it allows students more practical experiences of working with individuals who may not have enough knowledge of legal matters'. Students also emphasised the importance for them in building connections with the local community, with students reflecting: '[i]t helps create a meaningful connection with the community, whilst providing the public with much needed legal knowledge' and '[i]t helps to forge a link between the university (which itself is partly publicly funded) and the local community'.

Similar themes were identified in Ashton's study, when considering responses from her inaugural Street Law students at the University of Sussex: 'all felt that working with Street Law had helped them to see the potential for law as a positive force to effect societal change, rather than as something

⁸⁷ Chad Christensen 'Preparing Law Students to be Successful Lawyers' (2020) 69(2) Journal of Legal Education 502-524.

⁸⁸ For example, see: Richard Grimes, Joel Klaff and Colleen Smith, 'Legal Skills and Clinical Legal Education - A Survey of Undergraduate Law School Practice' (1996) 30 The Law Teacher 44

⁸⁹ Sadie Whittam, 'Keep It Real: The Case for Introducing Authentic Tasks in the Undergraduate Law Degree' (2023) 33 Legal Education Review 127

⁹⁰ See discussion in: Jenny Knox and Melanie Stone 'Embedding employability skills for the legal professionals of the future' (2019) 53(1) The Law Teacher 90-101

⁹¹ For example, Bar Courses or Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) preparation courses.

⁹² [Francina Cantatore](#), [David McQuoid-Mason](#), [Valeska Geldres-Weiss](#) & [Juan Carlos Guajardo-Puga](#) 'A comparative study into legal education and graduate employability skills in law students through pro bono law clinics' (2021) 55(3) The Law Teacher 314, 315

simply to be studied for their degree.⁹³ A similar theme emerged in Golob's research which found that Street Law provided students with an opportunity to see the world through the eyes of others.⁹⁴

Altruism:

All students who responded considered that law students should participate in community engagement projects (13 students). Student responses again focused on the importance of skill development (particularly in relation to developing, improving and overcoming fear of public speaking as discussed earlier in the article) and also considered the theme of altruism. Altruism is acknowledged in responses such as 'From a moral point of view, voluntary and pro bono work can help teach the importance of helping the community.' Another student stated, 'It gives something back to the community'. One student suggested a reason for this, noting: 'I think that studying in the classroom environment can often result in students feeling removed from the 'real' impact of the law. Thus, engaging in community engagement projects can help to remedy this.' The author speculates that a potentially advantageous outcome from creating projects for the advantage of the community in Street Law may be the positive difference the students consider they have made to the community they present to. The author intends to develop future research to further explore this hypothesis.

Conclusion

Community engagement provides a wealth of benefits to numerous key stakeholders including the community, universities, academic staff, students and prospective students alike. By surveying students participating in a Street Law Module at Lancaster University Law School over two academic years, this study has aimed to explore the value of engaging in a Street Law module, specifically with reference to presenting to members of the public and being involved in community engagement.

Whilst small in scale, the study has yielded extremely positive results, with students noting that participating in community engagement projects has been a valuable learning experience. Students saw increased engagement with the Street Law module, increased work ethic, increased legal knowledge and a wealth of skill development, including teamwork, legal research, communication and the ability to translate legal language for a non-law audience. In addition, this study has shown that Street Law encourages students to be active participants in their own learning. By utilising teamwork, students have learned through having autonomy over their learning and by engaging in student-centred approaches. Overall, students have identified that being active in their learning has allowed them to work on their own ideas, work on real-life scenarios, and understand how the law affects people in everyday life.

The fact that the community is at the heart of the Street Law project has allowed students to think beyond the walls of the classroom. The process has allowed students to start to appreciate how the law works in a wider sense, and the students have reflected on the purpose of law being to protect and advance access to justice. Students have realised that through the power of Street Law, and through sharing their knowledge and expertise with the community, they are advancing PLE, whilst also developing their own skills and employability skills.

Acknowledgements/Funding

The author would like to thank the Street Law students who participated in this study, and the schools we work alongside each year. Thank you to Sadie Whittam (Lancaster University Law School) for considering early drafts of this article. Thank you to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback.

⁹³ Ashton (n 83) 59

⁹⁴ Golob (n 41) 75