



Measuring educational gain: Liverpool John Moores University case study

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Facilitating educational gain in Law curriculum

Over 40% of Liverpool John Moores University students come from the Liverpool City Region, which has two of the most deprived local authorities in England. Socio-economic inequality means that a high proportion of our students do not have the privilege of networks and connections that characterise the life experience of more advantaged students. Lack of opportunity, coupled with the need to earn money means that many LJMU students are unable to demonstrate extensive participation in extra-curricular activities that are valued by employers. Social stratification of the legal profession is particularly well known. For example, Law Society statistics demonstrates that 22% of solicitors attended a fee-paying school compared with 7.5% nationally, and 58% are from a professional background compared with 37% nationally – evidencing "patterns of social and cultural reproduction that frame access to the legal profession" (Francis, 2015).

Providing students with opportunities to acquire and demonstrate practical skills by gaining authentic learning experiences that raise aspirations, contextualising skills and knowledge and supporting achievement relevant to students' future ambitions, has been a locus of the institutional and the programme's vision for educational gain.

The first step in driving educational gain and encouraging Law students to monitor their progress was to audit employability skills in the curriculum, from induction to graduation and beyond. Aligned with this, students were given the opportunity to shape their educational and professional journey through a range of module choices that reflected distinct academic or practice pathways.

In addition to mapping each module in the undergraduate portfolio against a range of employability skills and encouraging students' reflection on development of these skills as part of their assessment and personal tutor sessions, the Law School has also engaged Northern Power to provide careers mentoring to every single L4, L5 and L6 students by accomplished industry, business and professional leaders.

The largest development in the undergraduate portfolio from 2021-22 onwards was embedding the Legal Advice Centre (LAC) into the curriculum. Students are given a choice to take a Law Clinic module, where they give free legal advice (under supervision) to members of public. All students undertake a core module at L4 (Legal and Professional Ethics) that prepares them to undertake casework at Levels 5 and 6 if they choose. In 2022-23, 525 undergraduate students from all levels of study took part in the Clinic modules.

This initiative also facilitated implementation of a range of new assessment formats within the School, including reflective video assessments at level 4; a portfolio of casework at level 5; and a portfolio of skills reflection plus a reflective oral presentation at level 6 in the Law Clinic. LJMU Law alumni also take an active part by volunteering in Clinic sessions and creating networking opportunities for Level 6.

To further support the skill development, skills-based modules (Civil Dispute Resolution, Legal Advice Centre Modules, Negotiation, and Mediation) have a higher level of contact hours and an emphasis on small group teaching. In recognition of the competing demands on students' time, the programme is timetabled into concentrated periods. This facilitates attendance and engagement by allowing students to balance their studies against external pressures.

Measuring educational gain

There are several aspects that should be considered when attempting to measure educational gain. These include: 1) student's perceived and actual progress in the development of knowledge, skills and experience, 2) progression to employment or PG education, and 3) social mobility to establish the social distance travelled by graduates.

Module based data offers a granular picture of a student journey. This includes attainment related data, and also opportunity to engage in reflection on their progress with learning and skills development as part of assessment and personal tutor sessions. Existed data sources are being modelled and will be utilised for monitoring student progress.

Additional indicator of students' perceived progress (cohort level) is module evaluation. Module evaluation results show that overall satisfaction for the Clinic modules is above 90% (8% above the average for non-LAC modules), with students also highly rating their ability to think deeply about subject area (satisfaction between 84% and 100%). Encouraging high response rates (currently vary between 35% and 55%) for the measures to be as valid and representative as possible is an essential criterion to address.

Educational gain for LAC modules has been articulated by students in their module level feedback. Students particularly appreciated the opportunity to work in a pro bono clinic and produce advice for a real client. They saw the modules as helping them build confidence in their workplace capabilities, better understand the nature of industry-required skills, and appreciate the world of work. Students also reported enhanced motivation and accountability from working in a curriculum-based activity that benefitted the community.

This module has offered such a wide view on legal work in practice which I have found invaluable. Not only developing our legal skills, but in understanding how society needs the law and how we can help and provide to those who need it. Such an important module for both legal skills and personal/ professional development.

I have enjoyed the practicality of this module. I find the work really interesting and it gives me a challenge. I think it is great that we are doing the work we would be doing when qualified, it has helped me gain so much knowledge and confidence and I feel more prepared for my future as it has gave me a taster of what I will be doing.

Explicitly asking students to reflect on the educational gain via a module-specific free text question is currently being considered.

NSS satisfaction with opportunity to apply what has been learned has increased at programme level for final year students who benefitted from the introduction of enhanced skills support in 2021-22.

NSS Year	My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt
2020	70.83
2021	60.84
2022	81.18

NSS comments also reflected the value of skills-based modules for career planning and helping students to think more critically.

The new NSS question on Learning Opportunities, “How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?” should provide an indicative measure of students’ perceived readiness in the 2022/23 data and serve as a baseline figure for monitoring progress.

Additional evidence will be derived from the Graduate Outcomes Survey (*‘I am using what I learned during my studies in my current work’*), when the cohort’s data set becomes available.

Interim evidence of educational gain was collected from students’ reported destinations in Semester 2. Level 6 students who took a yearlong Clinic module indicated that:

- 77% were continuing straight on to Legal Practice Course
- 5% were undertaking other PG study (academic masters)
- 9% were going to the Bar Practice Course, one with a scholarship
- 38% have a paralegal post already
- 8% are undecided or doing other things next (including social work and teaching).

Social mobility by subject and courses will be tracked via relevant indexes, including Institute for Fiscal Studies or HEPI Index, when new data sets are published.

References

Francis, A. (2015) Legal Education, Social Mobility, and Employability: Possible Selves, Curriculum Intervention, and the Role of Legal Work Experience), *Journal of Law and Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6478.2015.00704.x>

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