

**Pro Bono Advice and Legal Services Project
Evaluation Report on the Sessions and the Partnership**

1. Executive Summary

The project

This report describes the results of a collaborative project to deliver public legal education (PLE) to a range of communities through a partnership between the Public Legal Education Network (Plenet), the College of Law, LawWorks, and advice services networks. The project was initiated and coordinated by Plenet (www.plenet.org.uk¹) as part of its mission to support the development of good quality public legal education in the UK. Early in the life of the project two new advice network partners - Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) and South West London Advice 'Advice Plus' Project (SWLAAP) - joined the partnership.

The project aimed to explore the challenges and opportunities for legal professionals to deliver PLE, and so to reflect on and learn about their potential for empowering people through improved legal capability. In particular the project sought to examine how the use of non-casework assistance provided by lawyers and law students might be harnessed to expand good quality PLE delivery to the public, in partnership with the not-for-profit advice sector.

The project delivered a total of eight sessions between May 2010 and April 2011 - of which five were evaluated. Three were delivered to advisers, advice services managers and advice services trustees - described in the report as 'intermediaries' - and two to groups of older people at community centres. Four different topics featured - redundancy, dignity at work, parking offences, and consumer rights. The sessions were provided by solicitors from two law firms - Allen & Overy and SJ Berwin - and by students from the College of Law.

Evaluation

Plenet commissioned an independent evaluator to assess the effectiveness of the process of establishing PLE sessions and the impact that the sessions had on the participants. The evaluation took place through observation of the sessions, and interviews/discussions with the providers, the participants, and the partners involved in holding each session. Where face-to-face interviews were not possible,

¹ The Public Legal Education Network has now evolved into a fully independent charity – *Law for Life: The Foundation for Public Legal Education* – which was launched in July 2011. www.lawforlife.org.uk

written questionnaires or telephone interviews were used. The principal focus was the effects of the sessions on the participants. This was assessed by developing an understanding of the goals of the providers who were delivering the sessions, and assessing how well these were met in terms of their effectiveness for participants. The underlying framework for the assessment was the core aspect of legal capability - the acquisition of skills, knowledge and confidence in recognising and dealing with life events that have a legal dimension through PLE sessions.

Findings

The assessment found that the sessions were overall fairly successful in enabling participants to recognise and be able to deal better with the relevant legal situations, and to understand the legal principles, concepts and processes involved in each topic. This was more the case for the three sessions aimed at intermediaries. It was clear that solicitors in private practice have a raft of skills as well as knowledge that enables them to provide high quality sessions with relative ease.

Two different delivery approaches were identified. The first sought to provide an 'overview' of the law and key processes, and to consolidate this through exercises, illustrations and discussions. The second took as its starting point practical illustrations and questions to the participants about practical experiences. Both worked well, being aimed at different audiences - the former at intermediaries and the latter at older people in community centres.

There were however some aspects that were less successful. The organisation and development of sessions proved more difficult than anticipated, especially in seeking to work with groups within communities, and the target of ten evaluated sessions was not reached. There was also a raft of practical organisational problems around dates and times and venues.

In most cases the providers had only a very general understanding of their audiences in advance, and in one case had organised the session around incorrect assumptions. Similarly, providers knew little about a session in advance, despite some serious efforts by project partners to make this aspect of the project work better.

Conclusions and recommendations

The sessions delivered to the advice agencies in particular were effective and valuable, and should continue to be developed. The skills, knowledge and experience of the providers involved were the key to this success. Whilst solicitors and law students had different clusters of skills and knowledge, both were able to produce high quality sessions.

Arranging PLE session requires a greater amount of attention to the presentation of the proposals to potential audiences including the language, promotional materials and mechanisms of reaching out into communities. More attention to organisational processes is needed so as to fully assess the needs of potential recipients and shape the delivery to meet their needs effectively. For example, community development approaches should be explored to reach out to new communities who may have a need for public legal education but with whom trusted relationships remain to be

established. Needs assessments should encompass cultural and linguistic considerations in order to ensure sessions are tailored and accessible.

The process of arranging sessions was, perhaps inevitably, hindered by continuing difficulty for all of the partners in describing public legal education. Typically PLE is still in the main described in the very general terms used in this report, supported by illustrations from legal capability projects. Taking these limited descriptions to community groups did not prove very effective.

Understandably such difficulties did not arise for the sessions provided by the College of Law whose model was to respond to existing community groups 'requests' for PLE sessions.

In the context of these setup difficulties the report recommends that future projects be more firmly supported by means of a dedicated coordinator with expertise in public legal education.

The success of the sessions delivered by solicitor firms should be explored through future projects to deliver to both intermediaries and directly to the public. The evaluation thus far suggests that there is a reservoir of easily accessible skills and experience in the pro bono community that can be tapped to deliver more and better PLE to both intermediaries and the public. Development tools to further this work could encompass training seminars for law firms, and public legal education materials aimed at supporting providers.

2. The background – PLE and the advice and legal sectors

PLE can bring a range of benefits to a broad spectrum of individuals and groups, including those who experience different forms of disadvantage. The core difficulty addressed by PLE is the struggle most people have to cope with the law-related issues they encounter in their day to day lives because of a lack of knowledge about legal rights and processes, and of the skills and confidence needed to make those rights effective².

Over the last decade the legal and advice sectors have suffered notable reductions in their capacity to work jointly to the benefit of their communities. Research conducted by Citizens Advice suggests a decline in the range of client services being offered by law firms in partnership with the advice sector in recent years. Factors such as a lack of resources to manage sessions and problems with the quality of services (such as cultural and economic sensitivities and knowledge in appropriate areas of social welfare law) were included in the reasons for agencies not working effectively with firms.³

² Public Legal Education and Support Task Force 2007

³ Pro Bono services and Citizens Advice Bureaux

http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/06_pro_bono_services_and_cab_final-3.pdf

And, as is shown by a study from the Ministry of Justice published in June 2009⁴, advice agencies are facing increased pressure on their services at a time of economic downturn, with services operating over capacity in many cases. This has led inevitably to constraints on PLE type activities, in particular because there has rarely been any direct funding for PLE provision.

One of Plenet's basic propositions in setting up the project has been that PLE supports and underpins the effectiveness and value of legal advice and representation. Drawing on extensive knowledge of the legal and advice sectors, Plenet believes that there are, beyond the traditional casework and representation forms of legal help, a range of transferable skills that are implicit in the work of the legal and advice professions - including negotiation and communication skills, presentation skills, and the skills required to draft and distribute good quality information on legal topics.

Whilst Plenet accepts that the value of advice and representation is enormous, the pivotal role of advisers and lawyers in improving access to justice requires that we think creatively about what can be done to meet the fundamental need for the public to understand and make use of common rights and responsibilities within a broadly defined justice system.

This is the context within which one of Plenet's fundamental aims is to strengthen both the provision of PLE by the advice and legal sectors – between not-for-profit advisers, and lawyers - and to improve and expand the collaboration between the two. This project is part of that aim, proceeding from the core assumption that a partnership between legal professionals and advice services would if successful benefit both.

Advice services are often located in and embedded in some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country, and enjoy 'grassroots' contact with their local communities, whilst solicitors have levels of legal expertise and skills - in for example advocacy - that are much less developed in the advice sector overall. In this context one of the goals of the project was to explore the mutual benefits of working together to deliver PLE.

Similarly, working together in the project also offered the opportunity to develop better mutual understanding of the respective roles of legal firms and advice agencies. By strengthening local partnership working, limited resources could be targeted to best effect in the interests of widening access to justice to the most marginalised in our communities.

Working with groups in communities offers the opportunity not only to deliver PLE sessions to 'the public' in the general sense, but also to individuals who may be involved in organising, or supporting local groups and local services - for example in youth groups, health centres, or older people's centres. Offering improved legal capability to such 'intermediaries' creates better points of contact for individuals in their communities presenting routine legal problems for which PLE may offer some solutions. Trained intermediaries may also transmit their new skills and knowledge

⁴ Study of Legal Advice at a Local Level <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/legal-advice-local-level.pdf>.

to their audiences and contribute to early intervention in problems that can prevent escalation and crisis, and also raise awareness of legal help and where to find it.

3. Project overview

In September 2009 Plenet brought together a number of organisations with an interest in pro bono work and advice services, and proposed a partnership project to work jointly on developing pro bono/ public legal education initiatives within their target communities - the broad aim being to build on existing relationships between community groups, advice services and pro bono providers as a means to exploring effective ways to develop more and better public legal education.

The initial project partners were the College of Law, the Law Centres Federation, LawWorks, and the Public Legal Education Network. As the project progressed, new advice network partners joined the partnership, specifically Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) and South West London Advice 'Advice Plus' Project (SWLAAP).

The partnership was relatively unstructured, with Plenet playing a general facilitation role, convening meetings, offering support on issues around PLE, and undertaking a brief evaluation of the resulting PLE sessions. The other partners collaborated to develop sessions broadly as part of their existing service provision, as there was no earmarked funding for the project beyond the limited support funds available to Plenet. This model of a loose and essentially unfunded partnership to deliver PLE was tested as part of the project.

The project sought to link the ways in which PLE was being delivered by law students and law firms to the knowledge and community contacts of advice agencies and their networks, so that the PLE provided pro bono by lawyers and students could better meet the needs of local community groups and local service providers.

The project aimed to develop a series of PLE pro bono sessions operated through a combination of presentations, workshops and group talks, to help community groups identified by the relevant networks as having particular needs in relation to knowledge, skills or confidence about rights and the law. The aim was to ensure community groups were better able to identify legal issues and take effective steps to manage their problems in a timely way, either alone or with the help of advice and representation.

The sessions were arranged through collaborations between LawWorks and the College of Law with the two advice networks. The sessions arranged were delivered by students from the College of Law through its StreetLaw programme, and by law firms Allen and Overy, and SJ Berwin, with the support of the LawWorks' community groups project.

There were 5 sessions in all. Three were arranged and evaluated in May, July and September 2010. Four sessions were planned by the College of Law for April 2011, two of which were evaluated. In total these sessions delivered to around 80 individuals.

4. How the sessions were assessed

Assessment of the 5 sessions drew on three themes: the providers' approach to delivering the session; their goals and whether they achieved them; and what influences or benefits the sessions had for the participants.

In advance of each session Plenet collected details about the topic, the aims of the session and the target audience, through discussions with the partners involved in setting up and delivering the sessions, and by obtaining copies of session plans and aims. The amount of detail available varied from session to session, but overall it was possible to get a general picture of each session in advance.

There were four methods used for the assessments of the sessions:

- Observation of sessions
- Interviews with the session providers
- Group discussions with the target groups
- Discussions between the project partners.

5. The five sessions

Of the five sessions completed, three were aimed at third sector advisers (both volunteers and paid staff), advice managers, and advice agency trustees, from one CAB, and from an advice network. The other two were aimed at groups of older people involved as members in a voluntary sector multi activity community centre. Two of the three sessions for advisers/advice sector managers and trustees were delivered by solicitors, and one by students from the College of Law. Both community group sessions were delivered by College of Law students.

Topics and audiences were:

- PLE parking offences session - delivered to advisers in Tower Hamlets by College of Law students
- PLE redundancy session - delivered to Croydon CAB managers and trustees by solicitors from SJ Berwin
- PLE dignity at work session - delivered to Croydon CAB advisers by solicitors from Allen and Overy
- PLE consumer rights session 1 - delivered to older people attending a day centre in Tower Hamlets by College of Law students
- PLE consumer rights session 2 - delivered to older people attending a day centre in Tower Hamlets by College of Law students.

Full details of each session are set out in Appendix 1.

6. Findings

Overall

All five sessions were well delivered and well received. Of the three sessions aimed at advisers/managers/trustees, two - the parking offences and the redundancy sessions - were judged by everyone to have been a real success. There were some mild reservations about the dignity session, described as 'a bit rushed at the start', not allowing participants time to digest the overviews being offered. But despite this participants expressed reasonable satisfaction with the session.

Both of the sessions aimed at older people attending day centres were broadly appreciated, though participant responses were more general than in the adviser-focused sessions. This is perhaps unsurprising as the sessions themselves were also very broad in their coverage.

Participants' responses to the sessions

The most unequivocal positive responses were found in the redundancy session, whose participants were engaged in difficult plans and decisions about real redundancy and who were therefore highly motivated to take part in discussions and present examples for comment that were real issues for them. This sustained high level engagement was an important factor in the success of the session.

Participants in the dignity at work session found the opening theme of principles in the law difficult to respond to, and would have preferred a more practical start, but found the rest of the session very useful.

Participants in the sessions on parking offences whilst very appreciative of the session overall, expressed a preference for a slightly different session content – combining the 'law' with more content on practical local policy and procedure. They suggested an alternative format, combining the law students' overview and an 'on the ground' practical and policy view from staff from the local borough (the parking enforcement authority). As a result it was agreed at the end of the session that the local advice network would seek to arrange a follow up session to cover these aspects of parking offences.

In the redundancy session the advisers/manager/trustees' responses and engagements were based on their practical need to explore and understand the scope and options available to them. In the parking offences session, although the focus was ostensibly on the participants' clients' needs, they tended nonetheless to focus on their own parking issues rather than those of their users. This included some grandstanding behaviour by individuals that the students struggled to either adapt or incorporate into the session.

Such 'personal' responses are common, and are to be expected as part of the development of an understanding of legal capability issues. But to make progress, participants need to be encouraged and enabled to see beyond their immediate individual concerns and move towards a sense of the legal capability frameworks,

issues, and possible actions that are present in the topic and in the 'law' more widely.

Some participants in the first consumer session were reasonably well informed and contributed well to the session. Others were less focused on the session, or were focused on other topics. In the second consumer session there was a similar pattern with perhaps more off-the-point commentary than in the first session.

In the second consumer session participants showed two tendencies that the students found hard to manage. The first was to give an example at length from personal experience but not quite to the point. The second was to try to demonstrate knowledge of the topic by making statements about the law or by referencing legal terms and even principles, again at length. In all cases these behaviours took up a fair bit of time and the students did not find it easy to shape these responses into the topic or into a broader approach to legal capability. As with the parking offences session, such responses and contributions are to be expected, as individuals relate what is presented to them to their own experience.

Outcomes and impact

One of the aims of the project was to assess the impact of PLE sessions on the participants, and the providers to a lesser extent. To make this assessment we needed to understand session goals in terms of increasing participants' confidence, skills and knowledge - the three broad pillars of legal capability - and from there to assess the extent to which such specific goals had been met, and then to go on to explore how those changes might have benefitted them subsequently or more widely.

However, the sessions had only quite broad goals and were not developed in terms of detailed gains in knowledge, skills and confidence for the participants. There were clear successes in the three sessions aimed at advisers/managers/trustees in terms of their structure - beginning with overviews of 'the law' and following this with examples, case studies, exercises and so on. This worked well as an approach to both 'overview' knowledge and to the acquisition of some skills in dealing with the issues. In the parking offences session there was a sense that the session did work well in providing an overview of the law and procedures, and that more local practice needed to be included in the session. In the dignity at work session there was a feeling that the initial overview did not work well, and that participants were only enabled to engage once practical illustrations were presented giving them with the opportunity to join in and discuss practical issues.

Whilst attempts to tailor goals to a more detailed profile of participants were made in some cases through discussions between project partners, on the whole this had little effect, and providers arrived at these sessions with only the most general sense of their audience and its needs. Indeed, for the redundancy session the providers arrived expecting an audience of advisers concerned about their clients' problems, whereas the audience was CAB trustees and senior managers with a real redundancy situation to deal with. With little in the way of detailed goals, impact assessment was not feasible.

Nor was it possible to make an assessment of wider 'impact' for the participants as sessions were treated as discrete and not planned into any broader goals. Participants treated them as 'training' or as 'talks about' - neither category being conceptually about wider or longer term effects. 'One-off' sessions are not measurable in terms of longer-term impact, particularly when any sense of continuity or engagement for the participants is absent.

The exception to this is to be found in the parking offences session - which helped the participants to realise that they needed a second session on parking offences, which was delivered but not assessed within the project.

It was hoped that the partnership would offer solicitors and the College of Law enhanced links to communities to deliver PLE, and that similarly the partnership would bring better quality PLE to communities, delivered by law students and solicitors. However, the limited number of sessions arranged makes a wide assessment of this possibility unrealistic. Working arrangements between partners were often patchy and it seems likely that at times it was not certain who was doing what and what stage in developing sessions each partner was at any one time. That said, there were no real obstacles to working together, and the different links and relations offered by different partners did work well when they were able to work together, and where there were sessions arranged, the links and joint efforts were productive. For example the College of Law linked up effectively with the St Hilda's East project, LawWorks brokered provision by solicitor firms working with SWLAPP project to deliver to a CABx and the Tower Hamlets Network teamed up with the College of Law and Clifford Chance to deliver to the local adviser network.

Approaches to delivering the sessions

The adviser/manager/trustee sessions

In all three of these sessions the aim of the providers was to give participants an overview of the law, principles and processes that underpin the specific topic, backed up with practical and illustrative examples and exercises capable both of consolidating understanding and making it relevant to the needs of the participants.

All three began with overviews of the law and moved on to examples and exercises to illustrate what happens in practice, supported by discussions and quizzes. This approach enabled participants to engage and take an active part in the discussions and other exercises.

One session was delivered by law students and two by solicitors in private practice. The main difference between the students' delivery and that of the lawyers was the depth of detail and the capacity to respond to questions and observations. The solicitors were able to deal with all of the questions, whilst the students were not - though it should be said that the participants had realistic expectations of the students and did not press them on complex matters.

The parking offences session and the redundancy session both flowed well from the overviews/principles to the practical processes and illustrations. In the dignity

session this flow was less certain, and the initial overview of the law and principles left the participants unresponsive, as they found little to contribute to broad notions of 'dignity'. But once specific examples were given the participants were able to join in and discuss the practical issues and 'real' situations. There was a general feeling among the participants that a more practically-based start would have been more effective.

But in this session there were two factors that may have exacerbated this difficulty. First, it was relatively short - only just over an hour long - and it may well be that this did not give enough time to fully recover from an uncertain start. Second, the providers arrived slightly late and somewhat flustered, as they had had difficulty accessing the building.

In the parking offences session, a different issue arose. This session set out a complex set of processes that participants were not always able to follow. In addition, at times the student providers seemed unsure which process participants' questions related to. The main cause of this difficulty seems to have been the complexity and denseness of the PowerPoint illustrations of processes and flows, which were too difficult to follow at times.

An issue arose in the redundancy session that stemmed from a misconception about the audience prior to the session. The solicitors arrived at the session believing they were delivering to advisers in order to improve their client work. But on arrival they realised that the audience was CAB trustees and senior managers who had a real redundancy situation to deal with. As a result, the case examples prepared were not very relevant to the CAB situation. Perceiving this, the solicitors modified their approach and used the main case study as a tool for re-explaining the law from a practical standpoint, rather than asking participants to debate and answer questions about the case study themselves. This worked well, illustrating both the quick responsiveness of the lawyers and the flexibility of the materials.

The solicitors delivered in pairs, and the students were in threes. In all three cases the sessions were divided into sections for which an individual took responsibility. For the students this approach enabled all of them to take part, and also meant that at any one time a second or third student was free to listen and field comments and answer questions. This worked effectively throughout the session. One pair of lawyers divided the session into two responsibilities – one to lead on explanations and accounts of the law, the other to illustrate, and lead on examples and discussions. The other pair divided their work more by experience, with the more senior solicitor taking the lead most of the time and the trainee leading only on the examples.

The sessions aimed at older people

In both community group sessions the students had thought through the characteristics of the participants and discussed both the content and the audiences with the community agency's staff in shaping their session. On the whole this led them to avoid the use of aids, to keep the level of abstract legal content fairly low, and to lead with familiar issues and situations.

In the first community group session the students structured the sessions very practically, raising problems and issues commonly encountered by participants first and then asking the participants questions and soliciting personal experiences. In this way they sought to convey the most common consumer law 'situations' starting with real practical issues rather than through explanations of the law - working towards the 'concepts' rather than starting with them. This approach stood in contrast to the approach taken in the three professionals' sessions.

In the same session the providers felt that the information around the Ombudsman was not well understood and reflected that they might well have left this to one side - a step too far. They were surprised how apparently knowledgeable some participants were about consumer law concepts.

In the second community group session the two student providers adopted different approaches. Both stood when presenting and sought to adopt a chatty informal style. What they offered was a complex pattern of delivery where one student began with questions to test knowledge of consumer rights, and the other with questions to participants about their consumer experiences. As they alternated in short time bursts this had the effect of creating a performance - an effect enhanced by the self-consciously theatrical delivery of one of the two.

In both sessions the students worked in pairs, dividing the session into equal chunks and adopting different styles of presentation, depending it seemed on their strengths and preferences. They were especially concerned to avoid periods of 'droning on' giving facts, and so asked questions and used examples often.

Preparing and running the sessions

Partners experienced a range of difficulties in arranging PLE sessions within the model proposed by the partnership.

Once agreements on sessions had been made, it still proved hard in some cases to reach agreement on session dates and topics. Some adviser-related sessions were arranged and then cancelled, others were subject to date changes, and there seems to have been a general atmosphere of uncertainty about dates around two of the three.

In some cases the target participants themselves had real problems about agreeing on dates for sessions and also about arranging and sticking to dates. Some dates were shifted around on more than one occasion, resulting in sessions that, though in principle long planned, were arranged more or less at the last minute. This made it quite difficult in some cases to pay proper attention to important aspects of session preparation.

The two community centre sessions were arranged within a slightly different model, and this proved more effective. There was a simplicity about the organisation of these two sessions, which were brokered through direct contact between the providers - the College of Law - and the local community centre. Law students visited the participants' community centre and discussed the proposed sessions with staff

and with the local network, deciding on the approach to delivery and the main content.

This model - responding directly to requests - was more effective and efficient in terms of the resources needed to make it happen and the relevance of the both topics chosen and the style of delivery.

Whilst broadly speaking all 5 sessions went well on the day, a number of practical issues contributed to the minor difficulties experienced by some of the sessions:

- Provider knowledge about their audiences was good in 4 sessions but in one session – redundancy - there was an initial misidentification of the audience
- Audience knowledge of what the session would be about was more limited than ideal, despite in several cases efforts by partners to make this very clear
- Details of access to buildings and times of sessions for the three professionals' sessions were not as clear as they might have been, causing some delay
- Of the 5 sessions, three stuck well to their planned times, and two overran. The redundancy session was scheduled as one and a half hours, but went on for an extra half an hour, in the main because of the engagement of the participants. The parking offences session overran primarily because of the off-the-point contributions of a minority of the audience.
- In four of the five sessions some participants arrived late and some left early. Participants in the parking offences session mostly arrived half an hour or more too early having been given the wrong start time. In one of the community sessions there seemed to be a constant flow of people in and out of the session.
- In the dignity session the providers arrived slightly late because of difficulties accessing the premises and reported being a bit flustered. As a result when their starting approach to the session was not very well received, it took them longer than it might otherwise have to adjust the session to the right tone, balance, and content.

PLE sessions do require a lot of organising, and some partners seem to have underestimated the degree of difficulty and amount of work involved. Both the numbers of 'stakeholders' and a lack of experience of working with community groups contributed to these difficulties.

Solicitors as PLE providers

The two solicitor firms involved in delivery have in-house training programmes for both colleagues and for the firms' clients, the aim with the latter being to enable clients to understand, deal with, and present their legal problems more effectively. In addition, both firms have a track record in delivering PLE sessions to local charities and other groups on a range of topics. Because of these experiences, both pairs of lawyers felt comfortable about delivering the PLE sessions.

The solicitors were skilled at avoiding giving off-the-cuff legal advice, and the need for such avoidance was understood and appreciated by the participants. There was no parallel expectation of the students, and in the parking offences session participants accepted that the students would not be in a position to give advice in any event.

The lawyers who delivered two of the professionals' sessions were also working within their specialisms and attributed their success substantially to this aspect. This is a commonly held view that we reflect on and challenge in the Conclusions section below.

Law students as PLE providers

The students who delivered the parking offences session worked well as a team and covered a complex and detailed area of law and practice with great skill. They had prepared the session through research and also by seeking to contact the local authority - where they report that they were unable to elicit a response.

The thoroughness of their preparation and their enthusiasm were both factors in the success of a very complex session. Both the legal and process detail offered in the session and the range of illustrative and testing materials that supported this provided good evidence of both.

A similar picture emerged of the work of the students who delivered the community group sessions. For both sessions one of the students visited the relevant centre to discuss the specifics of the topic and the intended audience. Centre staff reported these discussions as thoughtful and thorough, and the students as insightful and well motivated.

There were occasional moments in the three student sessions when the limits of students' experience emerged. These were in fairly obvious situations: where some sort of legal question was asked; where specific advice was sought; and where participant behaviours were disruptive. The first two were limitations about legal knowledge and experience, the third about experience as 'trainers'.

Outreach work with communities

Partners adopted an 'outreach' model to develop PLE sessions in the first instance, seeking to make contact with community groups and work with those with an interest in and willingness to take part in PLE sessions. This proved very difficult, despite in all cases close work with local networks. The problems encountered by the partners in explaining their goals and plans to community groups are familiar PLE-related difficulties:

- Some groups struggle to see how 'the law' relate to them and found it hard to identify a 'legal' topic that might be useful or relevant
- It was difficult to put across what PLE is and describe what was being offered - one suggestions made was that it might have been better, for example, to show a DVD of PLE being delivered if we wanted to attract interest from young people.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. Solicitors' experience of delivery of PLE within their firms gave them a solid basis for delivering these sessions. Their experience as lawyers, as providers of seminars to their clients, and as team workers all played a role in the successful delivery of good sessions.
2. Solicitors bring a wide range of knowledge and skills to the delivery of PLE that stretch well beyond their own subject specialisms. Whilst they seem to prefer to stay within their specialisms, there were clearly important skills and broad knowledge that played an important role in the success of their sessions.
3. Law students can deliver useful PLE sessions and can think through, design, and deliver these effectively.
4. A key factor in the success of all five sessions was the skill and determination of all of the providers.
5. The collaborative approach of the individual providers in each 'team' helped to make the delivery more interesting and played to different providers' strengths.
6. Two approaches were used to deliver sessions: leading with overviews of the law, and leading with questions and examples. Both worked well, suiting their specific audiences. The intermediaries' sessions were all structured around law, rules, concepts, principles and processes and supported by illustrative practical examples, exercises, and discussions of real problems.
7. The community group sessions were led more by illustrations, problems or issues, with these leading on to legal concepts or actual law. These sessions were perhaps more focused on 'informing' rather than 'enabling', when compared to the intermediaries' sessions.
8. The 'balance' between these approaches is a key issue for the development of PLE. PLE thinking has not so far suggested that there is a 'correct' method suitable for all audiences and topics, and the limited number of sessions permit us only to say there is some evidence here that both may work well depending on audience.
9. PLE thinking also stresses the transferable skills and confidence/attitudes elements of legal capability, so that sessions might include negotiation exercises, or how to approach a formal appeal body - and so on. These aspects of PLE feature only slightly in any of the sessions.
10. What PLE thinking has also emphasised are the benefits of teasing out the generalisable principles and concepts in any legal issue, so that the

knowledge acquired about a specific topic can have a measure of transferability to other circumstances. 'Discretion' and 'reasonableness' seem to have come up as issues (principles or concepts?) several times, offering an opportunity to look more broadly at how these notions are deployed in legal processes. But this was not, on the whole, done.

11. Because most participants had only the most general knowledge of what the session was to be about, what was delivered was typically not quite what was expected. This increased the need for adjustments by all parties on the day.
12. Active engagement by participants was very important in the success of the sessions. In the intermediaries' sessions, the participants had specific needs for new knowledge, awareness, skills and so on, around specific topics, and the grounded nature of these needs helped make the sessions very relevant and so successful. In the community group sessions there was less practical engagement, primarily because many participants were focused on specific personal issues or experiences, not all of which were relevant to the topic.
13. Such differences in engagement patterns may be attributable to the differences between the more focused needs of the intermediaries as against the broader needs of the older people. But it is difficult to be certain about this, and it may well have been coincidental.
14. The three intermediaries' sessions were slightly better received than the community group talks. This appears to be because they were all around specific topics or issues of immediate relevance to their audiences, but it was not possible to draw any conclusions from only three sessions. There is of course an accepted dictum that engagement is much more likely when a specific issue is of concern to a potential audience, and this may well be the case for these three PLE sessions.
15. For the most part the five sessions used a 'lecture' style, as against more participatory techniques. Talks, discussions and group activities such as Q&A were used. But there are many other delivery techniques that did not feature. What difference would it have made, for example, if a session had started with a brainstorm of current 'issues' or 'concerns' for the participants?
16. The sessions seem to have thought of as either 'training' or as 'talks'- both likely to encourage a relatively passive engagement from participants, where the typical approach is to turn up on the day without preparation.
17. This initial approach to the development of sessions was that of an 'offer of PLE' to community groups. This was not successful. Some partners felt it might have been better to focus on special topics aimed at specific groups rather than making a very open offer of PLE, which was possibly too abstract. Overall, a real 'hook' for community groups was lacking.
18. Overall the practical aspects of the development and running of sessions did not work well, with patchy communications between project partners and a

lack of coherence and clarity about roles. Partners also lacked the experience and skills needed to engage with groups within communities and so to develop an effective approach to PLE delivery. In particular, the difficulty of 'explaining' PLE - other than by offering examples - was not diminished in the project, Parents were aware of these issues and made real effort to overcome them, but with little or no success.

Recommendations

1. Partners need to be enabled to focus more effectively on PLE as a pro bono activity if it is to develop as a valued aspect of pro bono work. In particular, this may suggest that a PLE pro bono development post could lead to and encourage stakeholders and members to develop PLE portfolios and activities
2. Understanding of PLE pro bono remains relatively undeveloped and it is recommend that Law for Life makes renewed efforts to explain and illustrate it to all of its partners through seminars and training opportunities.
3. The reservoir of skills and experience of PLE in leading solicitor firms should be tapped to expand their engagement and delivery of PLE.
4. More joint PLE delivery by partners with different skills is needed. PLE sessions often require a mix of skills and experience to work best. Combining legal knowledge and expertise with, say, local knowledge about local procedures and practices may produce better results where issues have a strong 'local' element.
5. Delivery of PLE to 'intermediaries' such as advisers has worked very well in this project and should be expanded.
6. PLE sessions should be developed to test the two 'models' used in the project. Leading with law and leading with examples and illustrations both need to be tested further in practice.
7. PLE should be presented as improving legal capability for specific purposes and specific audiences. Presenting PLE as 'training' or 'talks' inhibits its ability to reach its potential.
8. Strong participant input to the preparation of sessions is needed and would pay dividends in terms of quality and relevance. Better advance briefing of participants about the session would ensure that it met their needs and at the same time it would improve their ability to participate.

John Seargeant
April 2012

Appendix 1 – The sessions

Parking offences session

This half day PLE session was requested by Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) and delivered by students from the College of Law at Clifford Chance premises in Canary Wharf. The topic of parking had been identified by THCAN as issue for Tower Hamlets advisers in the course of an earlier training programme.

The session was attended by 22 participants from 7 Tower Hamlets community groups and advice agencies. Some were volunteers, others salaried advisers. Participants' attendance in numbers shows a real relevance and importance for them of this topic. A THLC/THCAN staff member and a Plenet observer were also at the session.

Three law students delivered the session, which consisted of an overview of the rules, processes and procedures involved in parking 'offences', using lecture style presentations and Q&A small group exercises, followed by sessions on appeals of different kinds and how to deal with these, similarly backed up by Q&A exercises. PowerPoint was used for some aspects of the presentation.

Each trainer led in turn on a different aspect of the session. Occasionally the other two would make brief contributions during discussions. This variation of lead seemed to work well, each having a slightly different style, and it made the session more lively and interesting.

The methods used for this assessment were attendance at the session, a group discussion with the participants, a discussion with the THCAN facilitator, and a self-completion questionnaire for the student providers.

Redundancy session

This half-day session was arranged jointly by LawWorks and the South West London Advice 'Advice Plus' (SWLAAP) project at local authority premises adjacent to Croydon CAB in Thornton Heath. It was provided by SJ Berwin LLP, for senior staff and trustees of the CAB.

This session was the first of two, the other being on Dignity at Work – see below. The origins of both sessions lay in the Advice Plus project goal of offering PLE sessions to assist the nine SWLA partners to run their businesses effectively and provide services to vulnerable clients. Croydon CAB responded to this offer by seeking support for their trustees. The four training topics were agreed on through discussions between the CEO and a senior staff member.

The session was attended by 9 CAB participants – 7 trustees, the Chief Executive, 1 other senior staff member, plus a staff member from the Advice Plus project, and a

Plenet observer. The session was delivered by two solicitors from the Employment team at SJ Berwin LLP.

The presentation gave an overview of the principles underlying redundancy law and practice, the processes that had to be followed, and a case study. The session was supported with PowerPoint handouts, although no PowerPoint was actually used. One of the trainers led on the explanations of the law, principles and processes, and the other added comments and illustrations that supported the explanations. This worked well, and made the presentation more lively and interesting.

The participants asked questions throughout the session, and also contributed examples and ideas about redundancy decision-making and good practice. The lawyers responded to these questions and points with answers, illustrations, and discussion.

The methods used for this assessment were attendance at the session, a group discussion with the participants and Advice Plus staff, and a discussion with the solicitors.

Dignity at work session

This second Croydon CAB session, which lasted just over an hour, was arranged jointly by LawWorks and South West London Advice 'Advice Plus' Project and took place on 28th September in the afternoon at Croydon BME Forum in West Croydon.

The session was attended by 17 members of Croydon CAB - 1 senior manager, 4 volunteers, and 12 paid staff members – and a staff member from Advice Plus as observer. The session was delivered by one solicitor and one trainee solicitor from Allen and Overy.

An overview of the legal principles, guided by PowerPoint handouts, was followed by case examples and illustrations of behaviours that fell outside 'dignity at work'. The solicitor took the lead for most of the session and the trainee led on the 'test your knowledge' and 'key points to take away' sections. After a faltering start the participants begin to participate, putting forward their own views and discussed real situations.

Around one third of the participants spoke in the session, and most contributed in the 'test your knowledge' section group discussions. Towards the tail end of the session, participants began to ask questions relating their own/their clients' experience of the training.

All participants stayed to the end, and attended the concluding participant discussion.

The methods used for this assessment were attendance at the session by Advice Plus as observer, a group discussion with the participants, and a self-completion questionnaire for the solicitors.

Consumer rights - Session 1

This consumer rights session was delivered on 4 April 2011 to an older people's group at St Hilda's East Sonali Gardens Centre in Shadwell. It was arranged by the College of Law, with THCAN and the St Hilda's East Community Centre. This session was one of 4 consumer sessions delivered by the College to groups of older people at St Hilda's.

St Hilda's had links with two solicitor firms who in the past have provided pro bono sessions on different topics for the Centre's members. The consumer sessions are part of a financial capability package funded by a charity with a range of activities within it. But when the Centre approached the firms they advised that they lacked the expertise to deliver on consumer rights. However, one of the firms put St Hilda's in touch with the College of Law, who offered to deliver the sessions.

This session was attended by 18 members of an older people's day centre – the Sonali Gardens Centre, in Shadwell – which is part of a local older people's centre known as St Hilda's East, plus staff from the Centre and a Plenet observer. The session was provided by two students from the College of Law in Moorgate.

The session was structured around common consumer issues, leading on to the detail of consumer law. This was followed by information on complaints and redress. Key points were written onto a whiteboard by one of the students. In response to questions the students did veer towards giving advice.

Around one third of the participants arrived late and four left early. One or two had some knowledge of consumer law and asked 'technical' questions. A minority asked relevant questions and contributed relevant experience, but some made irrelevant contributions and repeated their points more than once. Several times there were episodes of chatting in groups not necessarily about the topic.

The methods used for this assessment were attendance at the session as observer, a group discussion with the participants, and a discussion with the students.

Consumer rights - Session 2

This consumer rights session was delivered on 4 April 2011 to an older people's group at St Hilda's East Older Peoples' Project in Shoreditch. It was arranged by the College of Law, with THCAN and the St Hilda's East Community Centre

This session was attended by 10 members of an older people's centre – St Hilda's East. Centre in Shoreditch, a staff member from the Centre, and a Plenet observer. The session was provided by two students from the College of Law in Moorgate.

The session was structured around common consumer issues, leading on to the detail of consumer law. The students adopted different approaches – one asking questions of the participants, the other explaining and illustrating aspects of consumer law and common specific issues.

Several participants had some knowledge of consumer law, and a minority asked relevant questions and contributed relevant experience, but some made irrelevant contributions and repeated their points more than once.

The methods used for this assessment were attendance at the session as observer, a group discussion with the participants, a discussion with staff at the Centre, and a discussion with the students.