

Centre for Professional Legal Education and Research launched

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Coinciding with the start of this academic year Birmingham Law School (BLS) has launched the **Centre for Professional Legal Education and Research (CEPLER)**. The Centre is a collaboration with the Birmingham-based legal profession, and its objectives are to promote professional legal education at both undergraduate and graduate level, and to foster research opportunities with and on the legal profession.

Professional Legal Education

CEPLER will extend and enhance the vocational training elements available to its students, so as to improve their employability and make them distinctive from graduates from other law schools. This will be done with the input of solicitors firms, and with assistance from a national set of barristers chambers. Leading firms of solicitors and established barristers already assist with the provision of sponsorship and professional help for the Law School's [Pro Bono Group \(/schools/law/life/pro-bono/index.aspx\)](/schools/law/life/pro-bono/index.aspx) and [mooting \(/schools/law/life/mooting.aspx\)](/schools/law/life/mooting.aspx) competitions. Under CEPLER these non-curricula, vocational elements will be extended with greater input from the profession: the number of mooted competitions judged by barristers will increase; the free law clinic will increase its case load by offering advice in a greater number of legal subjects; the Street Law project (whereby students have the opportunity to address groups and organisations within the community on law related subjects) will grow and the lecture series ran by the Pro Bono Group (whereby individuals, groups and organisations from within the community give lectures to students on law related areas) will be expanded. All of these activities will extend the scope for further interaction between students, staff and practitioners. Internships and placement opportunities for students will be increased so that students have far more exposure to practice during the currency of their studies. Other career-related activities, such as skills workshops, will be organized, and CEPLER will provide dedicated legal and legally-related careers advice

In addition to this, it is proposed to increase practitioner input in our teaching. BLS currently organises [Law in Practice \(/schools/law/courses/lb/careers/law-careers-events.aspx\)](/schools/law/courses/lb/careers/law-careers-events.aspx) seminars, delivered by practitioners who specialize in a particular area. The establishment of CEPLER will help us to introduce more of this kind of input into some of our courses so that a practice and policy perspective pervades subjects where appropriate. This will enhance and complement the academic content of the course, not undermine it. In time, consideration will be given to introducing new modules designed to be co-taught with practitioners, and will be investigating the potential for 'clinical' legal education as a supplement to our existing forms of education.

Professional Legal Research

Greater collaboration with the legal profession will be used to facilitate research on and with the profession. CEPLER will have a high-level steering committee comprised of a national set of chambers, leading firms of solicitors, judges and academics who will be working to identify opportunities for practitioners and academics to collaborate on writing and research. Further, the closer links between the legal profession and BLS will help facilitate privileged access to firms and practices so as to enable high quality research on areas such as legal aid, the impacts of Codes of Practice, the impact of Sharia law, the introduction of public access for the Bar, public interest litigation and the law on protective costs orders, changes to conditional fee arrangements, the introduction of contingency fees, litigants in person, ADR, the changing role of the judiciary and judicial independence.

Staffing

CEPLER represents a substantial investment by the University. This recognises the importance of ensuring that students graduate with the skills that will make them employable in a competitive job market, and of ensuring that BLS becomes a centre of excellence for research on, and in relation to, the legal profession and legal processes. BLS has already appointed a CEPLER Director at professorial level and two Teaching Fellows to help run the educational limb of CEPLER and a postgraduate teaching assistant who will carry out research on areas relating to legal practice and the profession. CEPLER also has dedicated administrative support.

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