

Open University Street Law Project 2021

Students and tutors share their experiences of this year's Street Law project.

Gillian Mawdsley (Tutor)

I was the tutor for the Street Law project which involved a group of students coming together to suggest ways in which those applying to UCAS could be better supported. That this project exceeded my expectations is to put this mildly. The students' account as highlighted below speak volumes for their experience and articulate better than me exactly what can be done when students join up in group work. The commitment, talent, motivation, and enthusiasm sparked creativity in relation to the aims of the project. Delivery of the project within the relevant timescales was no mean feat too, given that students have a life, other TMAs and work with which to deal. Ultimately there were five students who completed the project, their comments are below.

Gemma Routledge

When I received the email invitation, I had no idea what the Open Justice Centre was or how to get involved. There were a variety of projects including digital justice, environmental law clinic, St Giles Pantry project, Al-Haq project, Citizens Advice – Witness Support Service, Support Through Court and Street Law and the application process was straightforward.

I was drawn to several projects, but Street Law fitted really well with my choice of modules and professional work. I thought long and hard before applying, would I have the time, what would I bring and would we be able to write a meaningful report with such a tight turnaround time.

For me it has been one of the highlights of this academic year and although we have moved away from the original task we have identified areas within the UCAS application process that are no longer fit for purpose, not just due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and I very much hope that we will be able to influence and shape positive changes going forward.

Working virtually with such a diverse group has had its ups and downs. Finding time to meet and assign tasks was at times challenging and Zed did a brilliant job of bringing the research together in to the final report having introduced us to a new platform. Kirsty has kept us all in touch through the WhatsApp group and is now the OULS Street Law Rep and I look forward to continuing the project and rolling it out to schools.

Katrina Velez

I was pleased to be able to work with this group looking at the UCAS process, revealing some of its flaws, and coming up with some possible improvements from the viewpoint of the students. This was an exciting and dynamic area to explore and was of immediate relevance to a certain section of today's society.

Working on the project gave me experience in co-operating with fellow students and working on my own initiative. I learned from my colleagues and improved many of my skills along the way. Working in lockdown proved challenging, but as a group we managed to overcome the issues and pull together to achieve our goals. I am proud to have been a part of this project, and I feel a sense of achievement, both personally and for the group.

I would recommend anyone to take the opportunity of working on this kind of project as it is very rewarding.

Kirsty Lewington

To have been given the opportunity to participate in this project as a penultimate year law student is amazing, I feel incredibly privileged. The idea of this project was to help give guidance to secondary school children, to enable them to be able to move onto the next level of education.

Whilst conducting our research for the project we all drew the same conclusion about how poorly structured and less than helpful the UCAS application was with very harsh and repetitive questioning. There were also areas of the application that weren't even covered, for example, people with different backgrounds, disabilities, and people from different countries. This definitely, as a whole, represented itself as a big negative.

As a group we had similar ideas but also some very different ones. We also had many of the same opinions. This is what has made for a brilliant report.

By participating in this street law project, I have had the opportunity to not only help other people by composing this report but to also had the opportunity to meet other people via different methods online whom I now regard as friends. Anyone who is given the opportunity to participate in such a project should definitely grab it with both hands, it is a brilliant experience.

Zed Jovic

When I volunteered to take part in the project, I did so as the only graduate. I had little expectation of how the project would be structured or what it would cover, but I strongly resonated with its goals of improving access to education. We all did. We also recognised, relatively early in the project's lifecycle, that the UCAS application process does not adequately meet the needs of many students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, and that the scope of the project would need to be expanded if it is to account for some of them. Discussions followed; ideas, often borrowing from our own personal experiences, emerged. These ultimately informed our recommendations.

There is no shortage of adjectives that can be used to describe my experience of taking part in this project, but one—more than any other—captures the totality of it: meaningful. Meaningful because it gave me an opportunity to work with many wonderful people, each of whom had the distinction of inhabiting a different part of the country. Meaningful because I saw how introducing and deploying appropriate technology, in this instance Confluence, can facilitate collaboration and improve project delivery. Meaningful because it served as a conduit through which I was able to introduce two issues particularly important to me—mental health and refugee access to education—while also being directly involved in the formulation of the final report. Meaningful because the final report highlights a range of issues that deserve to be explored further and acted upon.