

Pedagogies and practices within UK legal education

Supervisors: Dr Caroline Derry and Dr Emma Jones (The Open University Law School)

Project description:

Legal education in the UK has always occupied an awkward space: Is law part of the humanities or the social sciences? How should its academic and vocational aims be balanced or reconciled? However, more than ever, it is currently in a state of flux and uncertainty. The proposed introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination in England and Wales, the changing legal services market and the wider policy agendas within higher education are all contributing to queries over the role and purpose of both the law degree and law schools more generally. This shifting landscape offers both challenges and opportunities for those involved in legal education within the UK.

One of the opportunities offered is the chance to reassess and re-evaluate traditional pedagogies and approaches used within the law school. Although legal education has become more diverse and pluralistic in recent years, it still relies heavily on lecture and seminar-based delivery and on the transmission of legal knowledge. With the growth of the employability agenda, a focus on producing skilled graduates, and increasing developments in educational theory, the question is whether the pedagogies and practices within UK legal education remain fit for purpose (if, indeed, that purpose can be identified).

This doctorate will allow the successful candidate to develop their own, original research focus within this overall topic area (sited within the field of socio-legal studies). Potential areas of research could include (but are not limited to):

- The tensions between different visions of the future of legal education (for example, liberal and vocational).
- The influence of the employability agenda and the changing legal services market on UK legal education.
- The growth of different pedagogies and practices, including clinical legal education, simulated learning and problem-based learning.
- The links between pedagogies and practices and law student and/or academic wellbeing.
- The role of contemplative and reflexive practices (for example, mindfulness) within UK legal education.
- A comparative exploration of the pedagogies and/or practices within legal education in two or more jurisdictions (including the UK).

The successful candidate would be expected to spend the first part of their research on familiarising themselves with the key theoretical debates and discussions within legal education, before focusing on their chosen topic in depth. The successful candidate may choose to use either a desk-based or empirical approach, or a combination of both. It is also envisaged that the student would become part of the Faculty of Business and Law's Centre for Knowledge in Organisations and Professions.