



From Classroom to Courtroom: Transforming Student Learning through the Refugee Rights Hub

Christopher Riley and Dalal Al-Yafai

Sheffield Hallam University

Abstract

This session explores how the award-winning Refugee Rights Hub at Sheffield Hallam University is transforming student learning by embedding real-world legal practice at the heart of the curriculum. Moving beyond simulated exercises, students engage directly in live immigration and asylum casework, supporting individuals and families navigating complex legal systems.

The Refugee Rights Hub has supported over 2,500 individuals and family members, with students collectively contributing thousands of hours of supervised legal casework each year since the setup of the Hub. This activity provides a rich environment for exploring the relationship between experiential learning, student development, and social impact.

Drawing on experiential learning theory, the session will explore how the Refugee Rights Hub creates a structured cycle of experience, reflection, and application within a regulated, emotionally charged environment. It will critically reflect on how this model supports the development of professional identity, confidence, and employability, drawing on practice-based insights from delivery at scale. The session will consider how students transition from passive learners to active contributors within authentic legal contexts.

The session will also examine the pedagogic design underpinning the Hub, including structured supervision, risk management, and curriculum integration. It will highlight recent developments, including the development of a highly qualified team with Immigration Advice Authority Level 3 accreditation, positioning the Refugee Rights Hub at the forefront of university-based immigration and asylum clinics in the UK.

Attendees will leave with transferable insights into designing and embedding high-impact experiential learning in their own contexts, alongside reflections on the opportunities and challenges of working in complex, real-world environments.

Keywords

experiential learning, clinical legal education, refugee and asylum support, professional identity development, student employability

Citation:

Riley, C. & Al-Yafai, D. (2026). From classroom to courtroom: Transforming student learning through the refugee rights hub. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Enquiry*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.7190/jostle.v1i1.616>