

Geographers and legal impact: Scoping the field

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Author biographies

Katherine Brickell is Professor of Urban Studies at King's College London. Her scholarship has sought to advance feminist legal geography.

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Cover image

Domestic violence law training, Cambodia, courtesy of Katherine Brickell.

Introduction

This report shows how geographical research and expertise is being used to shape law and legal proceedings. Through a survey and follow-up interviews with academic geographers in the UK between 2018 and 2022, the dataset reveals the often-hidden work that geographers are doing in the legal realm. The report documents, for the first time, the experiences of these geographers as they plan, pursue, and evidence their impact in and on legal settings. To highlight the breadth of ongoing geographical work with a legal dimension the report also includes analysis of Impact Case Studies (ICS) submitted to the UK's 2014 and 2021 Research Excellence Frameworks (REF).

The report summarises our findings, illustrating the opportunities and challenges of undertaking legal impact work, and its potential outcomes in legal, professional and personal terms. Across the report we profile seven geographers whose work has directly impacted legal processes. Our data indicates that a wide range of geographers from across the discipline engage in work that has legal impact. Of the 34 Impact Case Studies in REF2021 submitted to the 'Geography and Environmental Studies' panel that mention 'legal' impact there is a clustering around two areas: (1) environmental research, including the monitoring of, and improvements to, marine, waste, climate change and ozone protections, and (2) social justice and human rights research, covering issues and advancing action on modern slavery, precarious migration and employment, homelessness, displacement and land rights, and domestic violence. Our interviewees work in fields including geopolitics, social geography, transport studies, feminist geography, indigenous geographies, health geography, development geography, political geography, climate science and area studies. They draw on quantitative and qualitative data and often work in close collaboration with communities and/or individual plaintiffs. Geographers from all career stages – postdoctoral researchers to mid-career and established academics – engage in this work.

"Nobody else knows that I do this work. It's not something I advertise; it's not something people at the university know."

A key goal of the report is to make visible these endeavours, promote the importance of geography to public audiences, and to learn from geographers' experiences to provide better support and training for geographers in the future.

What is legal geography?

Since the 1980s, legal geographic research has examined the connections that exist between law and space. The field reveals how law – from international law, state-sanctioned law, to customary law – variously shapes the relationships between people and places. Legal geographers are interested not just in the 'doing' of law by qualified legal practitioners but are now also paying attention to what role geographers and geographical knowledge play in both court and non-court spaces.¹

¹ Brickell, K., Jeffrey, A. and McConnell, F. (2021) 'Practising legal geography', *Area*, 53:4, 557-561. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12734>.

Researching geographers' legal impact

This report draws on data gathered in three ways:

1. We designed a qualitative online survey entitled 'Using Geographical Expertise in Legal Settings' which we uploaded into Survey Monkey software and piloted. We then sent out invitations to the geographical community to participate via distribution of the call on mailing lists, a Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) mail out, and RGS-IBG research groups. The call for participants made it clear that we were interested in hearing about the varied experiences of (self-identified) geographers as they use their research data and expertise to shape legal proceedings. In total 21 people completed the survey.²
2. In-depth semi-structured interviews were then carried out with 15 of the geographers who completed the survey, and/or whose work on legal issues was in the public domain.³ The interviews lasted from 40 mins to 2 hours in duration and were carried out across 2018-2019 and in 2022. They were conducted in-person, and where not possible, online. The interviews enabled us to explore personal experiences and the opportunities and challenges associated with legal impact work.
3. We also identified and analysed legal-focused Impact Case Studies (ICS) from the Research Excellence Framework (REF) conducted in 2014 and in 2021. Impact Case Studies are a key part of the REF which is the UK's system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. Using the Impact Case Study Database we identified 28 ICS submitted to 'Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology' panel (REF2014) with 'legal' search term⁴ and 34 ICS submitted to 'Geography and Environmental Studies' panel (REF2021) with 'legal' search term.⁵ Across these ICS, over 40 countries are listed as the location of impact. Around one quarter of ICS list the UK as the location of impact.⁶ We analysed the research themes that underpinned these ICS, and the legal impacts that they identified.

² 10 identified as men, and 11 as women; 13 who worked in a geography department/School structure, and seven who did not, the majority had completed their PhDs over 10 years ago (15/21), were based in the UK (18/21) and stated that they had drawn on research-derived data or expertise in their varied forms of legal interventions (19/21).

³ Seven identified as men, eight as women; all had worked in a geography department/School structure; with a full-range spread across career stages.

⁴ REF 2014 ICS accessed via <https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies> - filtered by unit of assessment and search term 'legal'. Summary impact type classified as 'legal' produced four ICS. Search term 'law' produces 27 ICS.

⁵ REF 2021 ICS accessed via <https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact> - filtered by unit of assessment and search term 'legal'. Summary impact type classified as 'legal' produced five ICS. Search term 'law' produces 29 ICS.

⁶ It should be noted that this set of ICS is not comprehensive as not all ICS are in the public domain and there are challenges with how ICS are categorised within the database.

How do geographers pursue legal impact?

The research finds that geographers are involved in a diverse array of legal sites, institutions, and processes. This reflects the breadth of geography as a discipline coupled with the varied ways in which 'law' and 'legal processes' can be defined. Broadly, this involvement can be grouped into three areas:

1. Act as expert witnesses

One of the principal ways in which geographers contribute to legal process is through the provision of expert witness testimony. In these instances existing expertise or evidence is used in legal proceedings to help support or refute a particular case. Interviewees discussed involvement in a variety of legal processes, including government inquiries, asylum cases, environmental litigation, and industrial disputes. We found evidence of legal, corporate and political institutions contacting geographers to assist with the identification of relevant expertise.

2. Act as legal consultants

In contrast to presenting pre-existing research, geographers also act as legal consultants, where research may be commissioned in order to help support or refute legal cases. Examples from our research included state-commissioned work into international border delimitation or a civil society-funded investigations into the social impacts of a proposed copper mine. These processes introduce new ethical considerations for geographers, especially around the question of payment and the ownership of data.

Katherine Brickell: Domestic violence law and deportation

Katherine Brickell, Professor of Urban Studies at King's College London, specialises in human rights research in Cambodia. Her research on domestic violence law in the country had transnational legal and advocacy impacts in both Cambodia and the United States. In collaboration with the NGO Gender and Development for Cambodia, she led a ESRC-Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office funded study (2012-2015) to provide the first comprehensive appraisal of Cambodia's 2005 domestic violence law from a victim-centred perspective. In 2017, Katherine acted an expert witness for a non-profit organization in San Francisco representing a citizen of Cambodia, a domestic violence survivor, in her U.S. deportation proceedings. She drafted an expert witness statement based on the research and then testified and was cross-examined by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at their client's deportation hearing. The immigration judge's decision, testimonies from attorneys and their client, underline the crucial role that Katherine's research had in the successful outcome of the case, namely the deferral of removal under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). In 2022, Katherine again acted as expert witness in Boston, USA for a Cambodian domestic violence survivor fighting deportation. A confidential REF2021 Impact Case Study was submitted on the basis of this work.



Protest against deportation, USA, courtesy of Asian Law Caucus

3. Strengthen access to justice

In addition to work in the fields of litigation and criminal law, geographers are attempting to increase accessibility, visibility and intelligibility of legal processes. This involves challenging the abstract nature of legal process, translating legal ideas into more accessible language, or advocating on behalf of vulnerable or marginalised groups who have been excluded from legal protections.

“We made a website for abortion seekers across Europe that’s like a multilingual kind of web resource... We were intentionally not making it a legal database because we felt what exists around abortion law is actually too much like legalese that isn’t very practically helpful. So what we made deliberately only included the bare minimum of law and actually leaned much more heavy on the kind of practicalities of like, OK, ‘what’s your situation?’”

Sydney Calkin: Legal geographies of abortion access

Sydney Calkin is Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at Queen Mary, University of London. Motivated by an intellectual interest in the political and economic processes that sustain gender inequalities and a personal commitment to feminist political change and reproductive justice, Sydney has been investigating the political geographies of abortion access. With support from a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship and a HSS Collaboration Fund grant she has been working on pro-choice activism and state reproductive control with a focus on the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Poland, and the USA.⁷ In the context of the growing availability of safe abortion with pills Sydney has been tracing how access to abortion can be decoupled from restrictive national legal frameworks in a woman’s place of residence. Drawing on her research, Sydney has submitted a response to the Irish Government consultation on the state’s recent abortion law, engaged in awareness raising around legal decision making in Poland, and collaborated with the Abortion Support Network to design a web resource provides information for abortion travellers across Europe.⁸



A rally in Dublin in 2012 in memory of Savita Halappanavar
courtesy of Streets of Dublin

⁷ For examples of Sydney’s media engagements see: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/how-abortion-pills-changed-the-political-debate-in-ireland/2022/05/17/f409c526-d5ed-11ec-be17-286164974c54_story.html; <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-05-05/abortion-rights-falter-as-democracy-slides?sref=Uc3QjJZ6#xi4y7vzkq>; <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/04/its-a-hell-of-a-scary-time-leading-us-feminists-on-the-threat-to-roev-wade>

⁸ <https://finder.abortion.eu>

What do geographers offer?

Geographers' engagement with law varies in form, function, and purpose. This includes scholars who use their expertise to intervene in a legal dispute, perhaps environmental or immigration litigation, and those who are studying aspects of legal processes themselves. In some cases geographers seek to assist in the enactment of law, for example by providing testimony or other forms of evidence, and in other cases they seek to disrupt or transform legal procedures on the grounds of perceived injustice or unfairness. These approaches are not mutually exclusive - individual geographers sometimes engage with a combination of these approaches across their career, or within a particular project - and are reflected in the legal impacts identified in REF2021 submissions:

- Demonstrating non-compliance of legal obligations, their limitations, and deficiencies
- Shaping improvements in accountability, reporting, and legislation
- Providing research to evidence the upholding of legal agreements
- Generating new avenues of legal recourse
- Improving knowledge and understanding of legal rights
- Enhancing the ability of marginalised groups to claim legal rights

Here we set out in more detail four key characteristics or roles:

1. Providing geographical specificity

Reflecting a long tradition of detailed engagement with the environmental and social characteristics of place, geographers provide contextual information to improve decision-making within legal processes. Respondents discuss how geographical knowledge can challenge some of the abstract and impersonal understandings of place, to foreground the needs and perspectives of local residents and ecosystems. These approaches often harness participatory methods, where research is designed in collaboration with research participants, to ensure a wide range of views enter legal deliberation.

"We did a whole series of maps with the community, a bird's eye view of the community - like okay so here's the mine, but here's also a wind park, here are roads, here's tourist activities like really showing the cumulative impacts of what's going on, so not just looking at the mining in isolation."

2. Acting as intermediary

Some geographers feel their role - at the interface between different disciplines - provides a good position to connect different areas of expertise. Respondents in this instance speak of acting as conduits between lawmakers and community organisations, bridging the perceived 'gap' between law and society. But equally geography's characteristic of spanning the natural and social sciences leads some respondents to perform a role of communicating between scientists and lawyers/law makers.

Rupert Stuart-Smith: Climate change litigation

Rupert Stuart-Smith is a Research Associate in Climate Science and the Law at the Oxford Sustainable Law Programme. In focusing on the potential liability of greenhouse gas emitters for climate change damages his research examines the use and interpretation of climate science evidence in litigation, and methodological developments in climate change attribution science. Working closely with climate scientists and lawyers Rupert seeks to bridge the gap between existing climate science and the evidence that is needed for climate lawsuits. He has done work on the impact of climate change on glacial retreat in Peru in the context of an ongoing lawsuit (*Lluya v RWE*), and worked on cases that seek compensation for impacts of climate change, including mortality from heatwaves. He has authored expert reports for climate lawsuits⁹ and worked as a consultant for the Foundation for International Law for the Environment (FILE), supporting the development of FILE's legal granting strategy.

3. Challenging legal categories

Several respondents talk of using geographical knowledge and approaches to challenge the abstraction of legal categories. Utilising a feminist approach, several geographers outline how their work aims to humanise legal processes, whether emphasising the personal histories and identities of missing persons or removing legal jargon from law. This work considers how law is a lived and situated experience, widening access to rights, and fostering conversation about the nature and purpose of law.

4. Expanding the concept of impact

Many of the legal cases that geographers became involved in concerned environmental impacts of largescale infrastructural or extractive developments. Where geographers provide testimony in these cases it often challenges how environmental impact is understood, seeking to expand beyond technical assessments of the potential implications to focus on social impacts, such as on livelihoods, community cohesion, and social well-being.

“In the government working group we formed, we identified a gap in the government’s law on environmental impact assessment, that there should be a social and health component. We wrote the guidance and methodology for this.”

Hester Parr: Geographies of missing people

Hester Parr, Professor of Human Geography at the University of Glasgow is an expert on geographies of mental health, collaborative methods and creative geohumanities. She has extensive experience influencing government policy on the issue of missing persons through her ESRC funded project *Geographies of Missing People: experiences, processes, responses (2011-2014)*.¹⁰ Based on in-depth interviews and creative storytelling methods, Hester has engaged with returned missing people, families of missing people and police officers and NGO and charity representatives to understand why, how and where people journey to when they are reported missing. This research has added important new dimensions to existing police-based knowledge of where people go when they are reported as missing, bringing personal stories, emotional relationships to place, and the notion of journeys to the fore. Based on this research Hester has acted as an expert in producing national guidance frameworks for government in Scotland,¹¹ given testimony about missing people and safeguards to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults,¹² and influenced Standard Operating Procedures for Policy Scotland and Approved Professional Practice Guidance for police officers in England and Wales. REF2014 and REF2021 Impact Case Studies were submitted on the basis of this work.

10 <http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk>

11 <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/05/190>

12 <https://missingpeople.org.uk/files/InquiryReport-Safeguardingmissingadultswhohavementalhealthissues.pdf>

How do geographers become involved in legal impact work?

Our research indicates that there are three main routes that lead geographers to be engaged in legal work: (1) a desire from scholars to increase the impact of their work and consequently legal concerns are brought to the fore in a planned project; (2) invitations to contribute to legal proceedings on account of previous work; and (3) requests from NGOs or civil society organisations. Across all three routes significant emphasis is placed on developing personal and professional networks to facilitate opportunities and build trust.

1. Designing the research to engage in legal issues

Several respondents spoke of designing research projects that are specifically orientated towards impacting legal processes. This reflects a desire to produce relevant research coupled with the emphasis placed on producing impact through institutional and fundings agendas. Some scholars speak of keeping their 'antennas out' to scope for emerging legal issues or disputes, while others use participatory approaches that orientate attention to issues of injustice from the outset.

2. Invitation on account of recognised expertise

The most common route to participation in legal disputes is through invitation on account of being recognised as an expert witness in a particular geographical field, whether an area expertise or scientific specialism. The subsequent form of participation varies, from a one-off court appearance as an expert witness through to more extensive relationships with either law firms, investigating authorities such as police forces, or community associations that facilitate repeat requests for testimony. One of the common experiences was that a first appearance as an expert witness often leads to further requests coming from different legal cases, where a first court appearance builds the credibility and credentials of a scholar to enter the legal realm.

3. Through requests from communities

The other common route for geographers to engage in legal disputes stems from approaches from communities themselves. Often driven by a prevailing sense of injustice and inaccessible legal remedies, geographers draw on their expertise and institutional position as a catalyst to legal resolution. This raises ethical and practical issues, with some respondents speaking of being inundated with requests and struggling to know how to manage the demand.

Lorna Dawson: Soil forensics

Lorna Dawson is Head of the Soil Forensics Group at the James Hutton Institute, Visiting Professor in Forensic Science at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen and at CESPU, Porto. She has over 35 years' experience in undertaking research on soil and plant interactions, in particular its application in the criminal justice system. Lorna developed the application of soil organo-mineral markers in forensic investigations and was Principal Investigator on a research project funded by the EPSRC (SoilFit), developing tools for soil characterisation in forensics, including the use of geographic tools in research. She was also PI on GIMI, an EPSRC funded knowledge exchange project to set up a network and engagement forum for forensic ecology. This work involved collaboration with various forensic experts in the National Policing Improvement Agency (now the NCA), the Forensic Science Service, and various police laboratories and forces. She was Lead PI on a FW7 European grant (MiSAFE) developing and testing microbial tools for use in case work and was an advisor on a Danish research project to test soil within the Danish criminal justice system (SoilTracker). Lorna is a trained Expert Witness¹³. She regularly presents evidence in courts in Scotland, England, Wales and overseas, including Australia, and has worked on over 200 forensic cases in the UK and abroad. She is a registered expert with the National Crime Agency (NCA), Chair of the Forensic Geological Group of the Geological Society of London (FGG), advisor for the International Union of Geological Sciences, Initiative on Forensic Geology (IUGS IFG) and is on the counsel of the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes, Animal Plant and Soil Trace evidence working group (ENFSI APST).

Loretta Lees: Resisting gentrification

Loretta Lees is Director of the Boston University Initiative of Cities and previously was Professor of Human Geography at the University of Leicester and before that King's College London. An urban geographer committed to justice, Loretta is internationally known for her research on gentrification, urban regeneration, urban policy, urban public space, and architecture. Her research has had significant policy impact and she has a long term commitment to community engagement. She was awarded the 2022 Marilyn J. Gittell Activist Scholar Award by the Urban Affairs Association in recognition of this work. Based on her systematic assessment of the impacts of gentrification, Loretta has been an expert witness at three public enquires and the Haringey Development Vehicle Scrutiny Panel on council estate renewal in London, providing both written statements and in-person testimony.¹⁴ This included acting as an expert witness into the demolition of the largest public housing project in Europe which led to a precedent-setting decision based on her research showing the impacts of displacement on a longstanding, low income, Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) community.¹⁵ Loretta's research has inspired wider shifts in policy shaping multi-billion pound programmes to redevelop English council estates. She has also worked collaboratively on anti-gentrification toolkits for council residents facing estate renewal,¹⁶ developed an open access website,¹⁷ and informed housing policy and practice through work with the Mayor of London and Trust for London in her role as Chair of the London Housing Panel. A REF2021 Impact Case Study was submitted on the basis of this work.

- 14 <https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/s94119/2e%20Evidence%20from%20Loretta%20Lees.pdf>; https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/s94608/HDV%20Scrutiny%20Report%20-%20Final%20Version_1.pdf; <https://southwarknotes.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/aylesbury-estate-public-inquiry-witness-statement-of-loretta-lees-29-april-2015.pdf>
- 15 Hubbard, P. and Lees, L. (2018) 'The right to community: legal geographies of resistance on London's final gentrification frontier' *CITY: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action* 22: 1, 8-25 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2018.1432178>
- 16 <https://justspace.org.uk/2014/06/19/staying-put-an-anti-gentrification-handbook-for-council-estates-in-london>
- 17 <https://www.estatwatch.london>

Why do geographers get involved in legal impact work?

Four main motivations prompt participation of geographers in legal processes:

1. Expertise for wider benefit

One of the prevailing motivations for geographers' participation in legal issues is a sense that wider benefit can be made of long-term expertise on a particular place or issue. This leads to a sense of duty and expectation that they will be called upon to provide testimony in relevant cases.

"The reason I have been asked to do this [act as an expert witness] is because I have been working in the region since 1980."

2. Activism

The respondents often frame their motivations in terms of a political or legal commitment: the involvement in law, then, is a mechanism that could advance a particular justice agenda. This sense of purpose reflects an underlying activism, where either law is being used as a mechanism to confront injustice, or geographical knowledge is utilised to confront and change the law.

Nick Gill: Asylum adjudication

Nick Gill is Professor in Human Geography at the University of Exeter and has a long-standing interest in political geographies of justice and injustice. His Economic and Social Research Council funded project *Exploring Differences Between Asylum Appeal Hearing Centres in the UK* (2013-16) undertaken with a group of researchers,¹⁸ involved ethnographic observation of court procedures, focusing in particular on the impact of time pressure on the preparedness of appellants. Evidence from this research was used in a successful case brought by Detention Action to the High Court against the legality of the Detained Fast Track rules. This case led to the halting of the asylum appeal fast track system.¹⁹ Nick has also engaged with the charity JUSTICE's working party on immigration and asylum determination reform, resulting in a report that recommended a series of improvements to the first tier asylum and immigration tribunal.²⁰ Nick has also led a team of researchers on an European Research Council funded study of asylum adjudication in Europe (2016-2022)²¹ that has generated insights into how to improve the fairness and effectiveness of asylum processes during a crucial period of consolidation of the asylum system in Europe.

3. Care and responsibility

For a number of respondents there are also more personal aspects to the work, where care for specific individuals or communities galvanises scholars to pursue cases. The personal investment in legal disputes, coupled with the high stakes of the outcomes, leads to reciprocal bonds of care between geographers and those entering legal action.

4. Feeling good

Though difficult to quantify, there is a clear sense from respondents that the nature of this work offers a psychological reward in averting an injustice, developing a more accessible process or challenging environmental harm.

"...you know, I feel good about what I've done. Honestly good. It's one of the few things I've done in my job where I actually feel good...for me, it was a real sense of responsibility, because I was working with these people who have subsequently become close friends."

18 <http://geography.exeter.ac.uk/asylumappeals>

19 Judgement is available here: <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/detention-action-v-first-tier-tribunal.pdf>

20 <https://files.justice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/06170402/JUSTICE-Immigration-and-Asylum-Appeals-Report.pdf>

21 <https://asyfair.com>

What challenges do geographers face in pursuing legal impact?

1. Fitting legal impact work into academic work patterns

Many geographers interviewed for the study find that they were given stringent and/or short timelines in which to provide evidence for legal use. This is difficult to handle given the inflexibility of academic commitments (such as teaching) and the specific circumstances of individuals (e.g. working part-time).

"If there was an asylum seeker who'd been rejected, suddenly they needed something done by tomorrow morning, at least a stay of deportation pending a review or a judicial review...they needed somebody who could do this in the next 12 hours giving them the legal ammunition."

2. Physical and emotional toll

Some participants talk about the exhaustion felt undertaking legal impact work in addition to their already high workloads. Typically this legal impact work is not visible to colleagues, department heads, or their university, and thus was taken on in addition to existing commitments. Geographers' sense of responsibility – and even guilt – lead many to undertake this work despite the exhaustion and what some describe as 'burn out'. Others highlight what felt like immense emotional pressure and stress both to perform in new, highly technical, and sometimes antagonistic or stressful environments.

"You just literally can't do it all. But you feel bad... there's a guilt, and you have an obligation, and you've got skills that you should be sharing. So, it's been quite knacker, to tell you the truth, these past couple of years."

"[I had] no support institutionally or from the geography community. I was in tears the evening after a one and a half day cross-examination by a very aggressive barrister."

3. Lack of institutional support

Common to participants is an unease and lack of clarity on whether they were pursuing the legal impact of their research in a personal capacity or in an institutional one. Few participants received any form of support from their institutions at the time of undertaking the work, despite then making REF2021 ICS submissions based on these labours. Outside of REF, participants note the lack of recognition of this work as well as the lack of training. The issue of risk and liability for individuals is also raised by participants, and this includes a lack of information and support from universities on this concern.

"I think the university really should stand behind researchers who, because of the nature of their research, obviously puts them in potentially vulnerable positions...I would hope that if some of these things become public in a way that they aren't currently, that the university would help."

Looking forward

This report illuminates the important and expanding legal impact work that geographers across the discipline are forging through their research and identifies the opportunities and challenges of engaging in this field. It marks a first step in raising awareness of the breadth and significance of this work and provides a benchmark for the future, pointing to the need for improved support and demonstrating the value of recognising legal impact work. Based on our research we make the following suggestions as areas of focus for the geography community:

Celebrating geography's strengths – the report has found that the discipline of geography, in spanning the natural and social sciences, is well-placed to contribute to multiple legal domains. Geographers are forging long-term collaborations with communities that facilitates the trust required to assist with legal representation. Geographers from multiple subfields ranging from climate science to feminist geography, geopolitics to health geography, transport studies to soil science are engaging in a wide variety of legal mechanisms and settings. They are using their geographical expertise to act as expert witnesses within court rooms, draft legal reports, support plaintiffs, and improve knowledge of and access to legal rights.

Providing institutional support – there is a clear signal that institutions need to provide more support for those undertaking legal impact work. This includes: providing, or directing individuals to, formal training in legal procedures and roles; logistical assistance by providing time and legal advice when undertaking impact work; peer-to-peer mentoring; and, where necessary, psychological support. In addition, employers need to ensure that legal protections are in place for scholars undertaking this work.

Raising awareness of legal work in geography – one of the main findings is a sense that legal impact work is often hidden within the traditional aspects of a geographer's professional life. As suggested by interview participants, this can lead to legal work being omitted from workload models or not valued within promotion exercises. One of the key recommendations is to find mechanisms to provide recognition, incentivising legal impact work and ensuring it is appropriately rewarded. This includes institutional change to allow legal impact work to be more visible within the life of geography departments. But it also involves strengthening the interdisciplinary ties that help to facilitate legal impact work: i) increasing opportunities to discuss legal impact work, ii) greater dissemination of legal impact work within peer reviewed journals and iii) organising designated interdisciplinary workshops bringing together geographers and legal professionals.

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