Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

Scoil Ghnó agus Eacnamaíochta J.E. Cairnes
J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics

University of Galway Tax Clinic

Enabling Tax Literacy and Empowerment

University of Galway.ie

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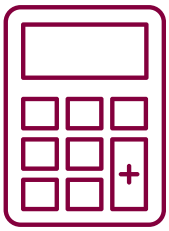
Some Highlights

The University of Galway Tax Clinic is a pioneering initiative for the public good, promoting tax literacy and empowerment, by providing free, confidential tax information.

Through an immersive Work-Integrated Learning model, the Tax Clinic educates the next generation of tax professionals in client engagement and real-world problem solving.

By educating and assisting marginalised citizens, the Tax Clinic enables tax compliance and advances financial empowerment for all.



Starting with a pilot phase in 2020, the Tax Clinic has consistently expanded its services and community impact year after year.

Executive Summary

Established in 2020 within the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics at the University of Galway, the Tax Clinic provides free tax assistance to students and marginalised citizens. As detailed in the Background and Context section, this pioneering initiative, supported by volunteer tax professionals and taxation students, addresses urgent unmet needs in tax education and empowerment in the Galway region.

The Ethos section explores how the Tax Clinic exemplifies an ethos of empowerment through tax education for marginalised taxpayers, while also facilitating collaboration across university, professional and community stakeholders. As covered in Common Tax Challenges, the Tax Clinic provides personalised tax compliance guidance to clients through one-on-one consultations with taxation students, supervised by experienced professionals. Backed by in-depth training, student advisors gain technical expertise and hone professional and communication skills while making a meaningful difference in their community.

As the first program of its kind in Ireland, the Tax Clinic stands as a ground-breaking endeavour. Outcomes and Impact provides data on the hundreds of taxpayers assisted to date. Insights from student advisors, professional advisors, community partners, and clients reveal the professional and personal rewards volunteers and clients gain. Our Research discusses the Tax Clinic's scholarship, seeking to advance clinical tax education and social citizenship globally.

The Funding section outlines how the Tax Clinic has successfully obtained critical backing through internal university financial support, while also actively pursuing external sponsors. Future Directions details ambitious plans for development, from introducing a dedicated university module to considering international student exchanges.

With proven community impact detailed across the report, the Tax Clinic serves as a model for improving tax literacy. Its continued success will strengthen its role as a leading advocate for tax rights and responsibilities in Ireland and beyond.

Shout Out: Tax Experts

Tax Professionals - Share Your Expertise!

If you are a tax advisor interested in volunteering your time and knowledge to advance tax inclusion, contact taxclinic@universityofgalway.ie to get involved with pro bono opportunities at the Tax Clinic.

Background and Context

The University of Galway Tax Clinic is a pioneering initiative, the first of its kind in Ireland, providing free, confidential tax assistance to university students and marginalised citizens in the Galway region. First opening its doors on a pilot basis in 2020 within the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics, the Tax Clinic aims to equip citizens with the knowledge to independently manage their tax affairs. Clients attend one-to-one consultations with tax student advisors, supervised by tax professionals, to receive tailored support on tax compliance matters. The mission of the Tax Clinic is to demystify the complexities of taxation, promote equity, and foster community engagement. We aim to empower individuals by providing them with the knowledge and resources needed to fully understand their tax rights and responsibilities.

After firstly providing services for the university's student body, the Tax Clinic expanded its reach for the public good to the broader community through partnerships with two local organisations serving marginalised populations. This collaborative model has allowed the Tax Clinic to identify and respond to significant unmet needs for tax education and empowerment among underserved groups in the city and surrounding region.

The considerable interest and positive reception from community stakeholders to date, underscores a pressing demand for the Tax Clinic's offerings. By providing expert guidance on tax systems, rights and responsibilities, the Tax Clinic promotes economic security for disadvantaged citizens often struggling with job and income precarity.

The clinic has to date worked with two key regional community organisations, namely, COPE Galway and the SCCUL Enterprise Centre, for the benefit of their members. COPE Galway provide essential support services for people who are homeless, women and children experiencing domestic abuse, and older people. The SCCUL Enterprise Centre aims to champion societal change by promoting community, enterprise, wellbeing and social inclusion. In 2024, the Tax Clinic will also partner with Focus Ireland, a national non-profit organisation providing services for people who are homeless and people at risk of homelessness, to further expand our reach and enhance our impact.

By training students through immersive work-integrated learning, the Tax Clinic strengthens their professional knowledge and skills. With guidance from experienced tax advisors volunteering their expertise on a pro bono basis, the Tax Clinic assists citizens navigating complex tax systems, obligations, and rights. The Tax Clinic's services have proven increasingly vital amid financial instability for many, exacerbated by COVID-19 and rising costs of living.

Shout Out: Community Partners

Community Partners - Help Spread the Tax Word!

If you work for an organisation serving marginalised communities who could benefit from the Tax Clinic's free services, please contact taxclinic@universityofgalway.ie to help us reach those who need tax assistance.

Ethos

The Tax Clinic's success is founded on collaboration, trust, professionalism, volunteerism and an immersive work-integrated learning environment. By fostering relationships with professional tax advisors, community group leaders, and the Irish Revenue, the Tax Clinic has established itself as a valued resource dedicated to the public good.

empowerment

collaboration

trust

professionalism

skill-building

volunteerism

Central to its mission is enriching student learning, providing training through sessions tailored to strengthen general professional abilities and technical tax knowledge. This emphasis on holistic skill-building enables students to deliver high-quality assistance under the guidance of experienced tax professionals. With its commitment to training the next generation of advisors, building community trust, and expanding access to tax expertise, the Tax Clinic represents an ethos of empowerment through education and cooperation.

Common Tax Challenges

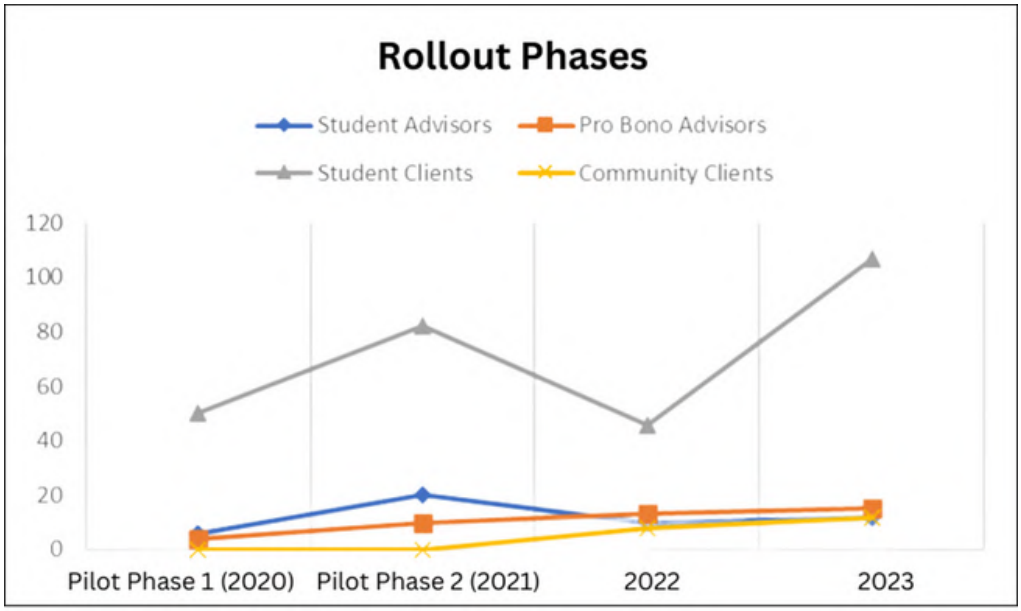
Insights from the Tax Clinic

The Tax Clinic has been instrumental in addressing a broad range of tax-related enquiries. These enquiries typically include navigating Revenue's myAccount, comprehending general tax situations, managing the tax aspects of having multiple jobs, understanding tax credits, claiming tax back, decoding wage slips, resolving emergency tax issues, and assisting international students with their Irish tax obligations.

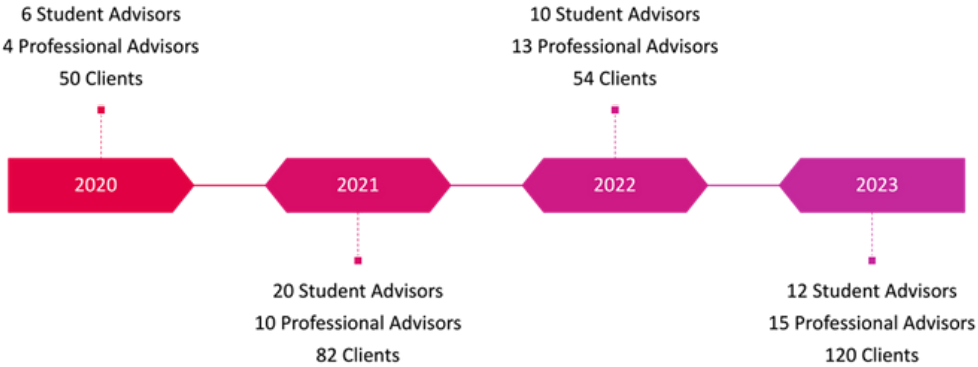
To read more about the tax topics that frequently arise among the student population, see our RTE Brainstorm article. The Tax Clinic equips clients to independently manage current and future tax obligations by ensuring they can self-assess previous years, accurately file returns, claim full entitlements, and take control of their tax affairs.

Outcomes and Impact

Since its first pilot in 2020, the Tax Clinic has seen a steadily increasing demand. It has evolved into a comprehensive service that addresses the tax information needs of both students and community members. The Tax Clinic demonstrated its adaptability by swiftly transitioning consultations online amid COVID-19 after initial in-person offerings. Extending its reach across the University of Galway, and then to the broader region, the Tax Clinic has continued expanding its client base and team of volunteers. To date, over 300 clients have benefited from the Tax Clinic's free assistance delivered through the efforts of 48 student advisors and 42 pro bono tax experts.



The Tax Clinic's model has created rewarding professional and developmental opportunities for students and advisors alike. Its strategic growth and ability to adapt to rising demand demonstrate substantial progress actualising its mission to demystify taxation, close equity gaps, and strengthen community connections.



What Our Student Advisors Think

Learning Through Service

The Tax Clinic operates as a work-integrated learning environment, providing tax students with valuable professional training that equips them with general workplace skills and professional tax expertise. Invaluable guidance from tax experts further enriches their learning experience.

Notably, many student advisors find the social impact of the Tax Clinic most enriching. They take great personal satisfaction in imparting tax information. The Tax Clinic emphasises the importance of sharing knowledge, enabling students to make a meaningful impact in the community. Its blend of technical training and social consciousness develop conscientious professionals dedicated to the public good.

Rewarding

"As a Student Volunteer for the University of Galway Tax Clinic, the most enjoyable and personally rewarding aspect of my volunteer activities was being able to help those in need of tax assistance and advice. It was fulfilling to provide our clients with the knowledge and tools they needed to navigate complex tax regulations and save money on their taxes."

Confidence and Skills

"For me the most challenging part of the volunteering was my lack of confidence. In the initial sessions, I struggled with effectively communicating solutions to clients regarding tax queries. Although I knew the information, I found it hard to translate this to clients. However, as the sessions continued and with advice from the professional advisors, I became more confident in my abilities and was able to more effectively help clients."

Enjoyable

"Thanks for having me along. I really enjoyed meeting all the advisors and working with ye, I'm looking forward to pursuing my career in tax even more now."

Shout Out: Student Volunteers

Student volunteers - gain hands-on experience! If you are a tax enthusiast, studying taxation at University of Galway seeking real-world learning opportunities, elect the clinical tax module and contact taxclinic@universityofgalway.ie to get involved with the Tax Clinic.[1]

For a student advisor's view on the Tax Clinic, view this testimonial video.

[1] This module is currently open to BComm Accounting final year students.

What Our Professional Tax Advisors Think

Giving Back & Mentorship

For pro bono advisors, the Tax Clinic is a rewarding experience both personally and professionally. Advisors gain deep satisfaction from providing their expertise to expand community access to tax resources. They also have the opportunity to mentor aspiring tax professionals, ingraining professionalism and enhancing tax expertise in students. Additionally, the Tax Clinic facilitates valuable networking with fellow experts and community leaders. Through multifaceted rewards, professional advisors' engagement with the Tax Clinic enriches their careers and wider communities.

"The University of Galway Tax Clinic provides critical support to vulnerable members of the community who lack access to professional tax assistance. I have seen first-hand how this service has positively impacted at-risk individuals by providing much needed guidance on their tax situation. The service's outreach efforts ensure that these individuals are able to access this essential resource when they need it most. It is an invaluable asset to the welfare of the community and one L&J Tax are proud to support." (Emer Joyce, L&J Tax, Galway)

For a professional advisor's view on the Tax Clinic, view this testimonial video.

What Our Student Clients Think

Transformative Impact of Tax Knowledge

"I am really impressed with the level of advice and help I received. This is a brilliant service!! As someone who was very intimidated by the tax return form this has really given me the confidence to fill it out. I had a lot of questions which were answered and I feel like my knowledge has increased 10-fold! Thank you so much!!!"

"Wow, I found this so beneficial. As a mother of three I should have learned how to navigate the Revenue years ago, but thanks to the patience and guidance of your volunteers I have managed to do a tax return and adjust figures, a thing that was so alien to me. I really, really appreciate this being offered, and your people giving up their time and evenings. I feel this is so great to offer to students in college that they would know how to navigate revenue starting off in their working careers."

"They were very helpful and accommodating, answering all my queries and clearly explaining each step to me along the way with regards to what we were doing and what its use/significance was."

"The help was fantastic. They made me feel extremely comfortable despite my lack of knowledge in realtors to tax. Everything was explained clearly and I wasn't made feel like an issue. Thank you so, so much!"

"I want to thank you for my meeting. This service is really amazing and we are lucky to have it in college. I have now a knowledge of tax that I can build on in life."

"Great advice on how to navigate taxes in my first full-time job in Ireland. Good advice on key points, and also key resources."

"I learned that I am capable of completing my parents tax return and that the process isn't as complicated as I thought."

"Helpful, friendly, competent support!"

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Tax Clinic

Free Tax Information for University of Galway Students

- Do you have tax concerns?
- Are you an employee or have you been employed in any of the last four years?
- Have you claimed all your tax credits, e.g., tuition fees, flat rate allowances, medical expenses, Single Parent Child Carer Credit, Home Carer Credit, etc?
- Are you aware of the new Rent Tax Credit effective from the tax year 2022?
- Have you recently been made unemployed, and do you know if you are due any taxes back?
- Were you in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and do you know how it's taxed?
- Have you recently moved to Ireland and do you know if your tax affairs are in order?
- If you plan to work abroad, are your Irish tax affairs in order before you leave?
- Do you have multiple jobs, and what are the tax implications of this?

To avail of a confidential and free consultation, follow these steps:

Step 1
Visit our website universityofgalway.ie/taxclinic for information.

Step 2
Contact us at taxclinic@universityofgalway.ie to schedule an online appointment.

Step 3
Prepare for your consultation by registering on Revenue.ie.

Contact Us:

taxclinic@universityofgalway.ie

universityofgalway.ie/taxclinic

Community Client Benefits

Advancing Financial Empowerment

Through collaboration with community partners, the Tax Clinic has expanded its free, confidential services to underserved groups in the region. By focusing on tax literacy and individual empowerment, the Tax Clinic helps marginalised communities gain the skills necessary for self-sufficient tax management.

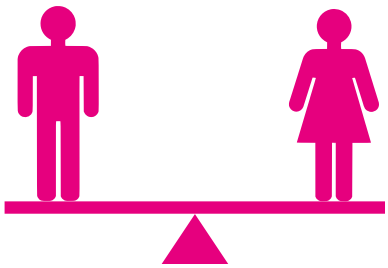
"The University of Galway Tax Clinic is an invaluable resource for individuals who rely on our services. It offers free and confidential support and information to clients who may face difficulties navigating the tax system and are going through challenging times in their lives. The clinic equips individuals with valuable skills and boosts their confidence, empowering them on their journey to a brighter future." (COPE Galway)

"It was very informative. Lovely and helpful lady I've dealt with has given me instructions on how to change my tax online as a single parent. Turns out I was entitled to different tax bracket and now earn a bit more. Highly recommend it." (Tax Clinic Community Client)

The Tax Clinic embodies social responsibility and ethical conduct. Its 2023 nomination as a finalist for the Irish Accountancy Awards' Corporate Social Responsibility category affirmed the Tax Clinic's ethos of empowerment through education, volunteerism and cooperative partnerships. With proven impact and growing community trust, the Tax Clinic continues working to close tax knowledge gaps to ensure full citizenship for all.

Pioneering Research to Advance Tax Equality

Beyond its direct impact on its clients, the Tax Clinic serves as an innovative and rich hub for tax scholarship. The Tax Clinic contributed a research roadmap for tax clinics worldwide to the International Handbook on Clinical Tax Education (University of London Press, 2023), referring to the University of Galway Tax Clinic and the research avenues evolving out of the clinic as a touchstone throughout this exploration. This roadmap provides an evaluation framework to inspire rigorous analysis of tax clinic models as they are established globally. It outlines research methodologies to capture the reach of tax clinics and measure their success as they expand access, improve tax literacy and drive systematic change.



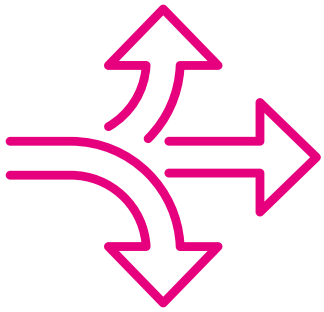
The Tax Clinic is engaged in innovative scholarship to analyse the impact of its programs and inform future initiatives. Two active multi-year projects examine the Tax Clinic's role in fostering social citizenship and shaping student professional identity formation. The first project explores how the Tax Clinic's services advance social citizenship, specifically among marginalised groups, by promoting tax equity, literacy, and empowerment. The second project investigates how the work-integrated learning model of the Tax Clinic influences professional identity development in student advisors. Together, these research initiatives will provide vital insights into how clinical tax education programs can enrich learning outcomes and drive social change.

Funding

We acknowledge and are very thankful for funding the clinic has received to date from a number of internal sources within the university to advance and sustain its operations, service offerings, and pioneering research activities: Student Services; College of Business, Public Policy and Law (Research Support Fund); Designing Futures; J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics (School Strategic Fund).

Looking ahead, the Tax Clinic will require funding to continue and expand its services. A number of external funding sources are being explored.

Future Directions



Official Launch

The clinic will be officially launched on November 2nd 2023 by Minister Hildegarde Naughton.

Education

A new Clinical Taxation module in the BComm Accounting program will attract students to participate as tax advisors in the Tax Clinic.

International Exchange

The Tax Clinic seeks to establish an exchange program by collaborating with clinics internationally.

External Funding

The Tax Clinic is actively pursuing grants and sponsorships to expand services and research.

Ongoing Revenue Dialogue

Regular communication with Revenue will support accessible, trusted tax compliance.

Cross-Government Department Coordination

The Tax Clinic can enable a unified government approach to financial literacy and equity.

Promoting Tax Clinics

With government and other support, the Tax Clinic model could be expanded across the country.

Conclusion

In a short period of time, the Tax Clinic has established itself as potentially a transformative force for the public good through tax empowerment. Its pioneering model provides vital tax literacy that enables marginalised citizens to take control of their tax rights and responsibilities, and equips them with the knowledge to manage their tax obligations into the future.

As an immersive work-integrated learning pioneer, the Tax Clinic prepares the next generation of professionals with technical excellence, professional skills and social awareness. Mobilising student advisors and tax experts in compassionate service, its ethos of volunteerism and education through cooperation will continue driving systemic change by expanding access, advancing policy, and fuelling relevant research.

With a track record of positive impact and a focus on inclusion, the Tax Clinic sets a strong example for cultivating more just and empowered societies. Its continued success will reinforce the Tax Clinic's standing as a catalyst for progress regionally and potentially an exemplar to follow nationally.

Contact Us

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