

Student Co-Creation Through Live Client Briefs in a First-year Contract Law Module

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Abstract

This article presents an in-depth case study of a live-client brief embedded within a first-year Contract Law module at a new-style university in the United Kingdom. The project involved two distinct stages of co-creation: first, a collaborative design process between academic staff and an external industry partner; second, a live assessment in which students worked directly with the industry partner to analyse, critique and revise a contractual document used in professional practice. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with four students, the study identifies five interrelated themes that shaped students' experiences of co-creation: ownership, structural design, future scalability, problem-based pedagogy and student agency. These themes illuminate how live-client briefs can operationalise co-creation by positioning students as epistemic partners who contribute to the production of knowledge with real-world impact.

The findings demonstrate that live-client briefs may transform traditional pedagogical relationships by redistributing authority, fostering shared decision-making and enabling students to influence both the process and outcomes of learning. However, the study also highlights structural challenges relating to assessment design, timetabling constraints, group dynamics and equitable participation. These challenges stress the value of intentional scaffolding, institutional adjustment to accommodate new demands and sustainable partnership models. The article contributes to scholarship on: industry-integrated curriculum development; assessment and evaluation of co-creation; innovative collaborative learning. It argues that authentic co-creation requires a reconfiguration of pedagogical relationships, a commitment to relational accountability and the embedding of co-creative practices within institutional structures. The study offers insights relevant to legal education and to wider disciplines seeking to embed sustainable co-creation practices in undergraduate curricula.

Introduction

Co-creation has become a prominent theme in contemporary higher education (HE), reflecting a broader shift from transmissive, instructor-led pedagogies towards collaborative and participatory models in which students act as partners in the design, enactment and evaluation of learning (Bovill, 2016; Cook-Sather, 2022). This shift reflects wider sectoral priorities, including student engagement, employability, widening participation and the development of professional identities. In this context, co-creation is increasingly recognised as a means of enhancing student agency, fostering deeper learning and cultivating shared ownership of educational processes.

This is a case study of a live-client brief embedded within a first-year Contract Law module at Anglia Ruskin University. The live-client brief exemplifies an industry-integrated, authentic learning experience that gives prominence to student partnership and collaborative knowledge production. In this instance, it required students to work with an external business owner to analyse and consider generic artificial intelligence (AI)-generated contracts used by the business, while considering how to develop these into legally binding documents. This task moved beyond hypothetical scenarios and simulations, enabling students to engage with real-world legal problems and contribute to the development of a contractual artefact with immediate professional relevance.

Firstly, this study advances understanding of industry-integrated curriculum development by examining how academic staff and an external partner co-designed the live brief to ensure disciplinary relevance, authenticity and mutual benefit. Secondly, it engages with assessment and evaluation of co-creation by exploring how students experienced ownership, agency and accountability within the live assessment. Thirdly, it contributes to scholarship on innovative collaborative learning by analysing how problem-based learning (PBL) and team-based structures intersected with co-creation to support student identity formation, confidence and employability.

The aim of the project was to investigate how first-year law students engaged in co-creation during the live-client brief and how this shaped their learning, identity and sense of ownership. The study offers conceptual clarity by distinguishing co-creation from adjacent pedagogical approaches such as PBL, groupwork and simulations. While these share characteristics, such as collaboration and active learning, they do not inherently involve shared decision-making or the redistribution of epistemic authority. By contrast, the live-client brief examined in this study placed students as partners who influenced both the process and the outputs of the task.

The present study contributes to the literature by clarifying the conceptual distinctiveness of live-client briefs and demonstrating how they can operationalise co-creation in a first-year law curriculum. It examines how students experienced ownership, agency and partnership within a live assessment and how the structural design of the brief shaped their engagement. By analysing students' experiences of co-creation in an early-stage, doctrinally focused module, the study offers insights into how co-creative practices may be embedded in contexts often characterised by hierarchical norms and rigid curricular structures.

Literature review

Co-creation in HE

Co-creation has emerged as a significant pedagogical orientation within HE, reflecting a shift away from transmissive models of teaching towards relational, participatory and collaborative methods. In co-creative pedagogies, students and staff work in partnership to design, enact and evaluate learning (Bovill, 2016; Healey *et al.*, 2014). This partnership is grounded in the principle that students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active contributors to its production. Co-creation therefore challenges traditional hierarchies by redistributing power, fostering relational accountability and cultivating shared ownership of learning (Cook-Sather, 2022).

A central feature of co-creation is its emphasis on epistemic partnership. Students are positioned as legitimate knowers whose insights, experiences and interpretations shape the learning environment. This epistemic stance distinguishes co-creation from more conventional forms of student engagement, which often involve consultation or feedback but do not fundamentally alter the distribution of authority. Co-creation requires a deeper commitment to shared purpose, mutual respect and joint decision-making (Whittam 2023 and Bovill, 2016). It is not defined by the activity itself but by the relational and ethical orientation underpinning it.

Despite its growing prominence, co-creation is frequently misunderstood or conflated with adjacent pedagogical strategies such as problem-based learning (PBL), groupwork and simulations; these may involve collaboration and active learning, but they do not necessarily entail shared decision-making or joint knowledge production. Clarifying these distinctions is essential for understanding the contribution of the present study, which examines how a live-client brief facilitated genuine co-creation between students and an industry partner.

Live-client briefs as authentic learning

Live-client briefs are authentic, industry-integrated learning activities in which students respond to real-world challenges set by external partners. They are widely used in creative industries, business and increasingly in legal education to bridge theory and practice (Braun *et al.*, 2019; Rochon, 2022). Live briefs are characterised by six critical attributes: inclusivity, externality, currency, significant and effective , mutual benefit. These attributes ensure that all students engage in employability-focused activities that develop professional skills and disciplinary knowledge.

The authenticity of live-client briefs distinguishes them from hypothetical case studies or classroom simulations. Students engage with real organisations, real problems and real consequences. Their outputs may be adopted by external partners, meaning that issues of quality assurance, intellectual ownership and professional responsibility become materially significant. This authenticity enhances student motivation and engagement; but, it also introduces pedagogical and ethical complexities.

Table 1. The stages of the Live Brief project

Stage	Action
1	Identification of a potential live brief professional partner
2	A meeting to co-create the live brief between the professional partner and academic
3	Professional partner introduces the live brief to students in a lecture
4	Students work in groups to offer a solution to the live brief
5	Feedback session with professional partner for student groups to offer suggestions on enhancing the enhance the contract
6	Online evaluative focus group discussions

Assessment challenges

Assessment in live-client briefs must balance authenticity with fairness. Students should be evaluated on their learning, not on the preferences or subjective expectations of external partners (McKenney, 2019). This raises questions about how to design assessment criteria

that capture the complexity of co-created outputs while ensuring consistency and equity across diverse student groups. The open-ended nature of live briefs may complicate assessment, particularly when students' contributions vary or when group dynamics influence the quality of the final product.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues arise in relation to confidentiality, intellectual property and power dynamics. Students may feel pressure to meet client expectations, particularly when the client is perceived as an authority figure or potential employer. Ensuring informed consent, clear role definitions and transparent expectations is therefore essential. These considerations are especially important in widening-participation contexts, where students may have varying levels of confidence, cultural capital or familiarity with professional environments.

Sustainability and institutional alignment

Sustainability is a further concern. Live-client briefs require persistent institutional support, reliable industry partnerships and staff capacity to maintain high-quality, equitable experiences across cohorts (Bovill, 2020). Without such support, live briefs risk becoming isolated innovations rather than embedded pedagogical practices. The context of the present study is an institution that has integrated live briefs across undergraduate programmes, demonstrating a systemic commitment to authentic, industry-engaged learning.

Co-creation and live-client Briefs

Live-client briefs can serve as powerful vehicles for co-creation when students collaborate with industry partners to generate solutions, negotiate meaning and shape the direction of the project. However, this requires explicit design. Without intentional scaffolding, live briefs may become simulations rather than genuine partnerships. The present study distinguishes two stages of co-creation:

1. Co-design between academic staff and the industry partner, in which the parameters of the brief are collaboratively developed.
2. Co-creation between students and the industry partner, in which students engage directly with the client to analyse, critique and revise a contractual document.

This dual-stage model embeds partnership at multiple levels, positioning students not only as participants in a task, but as contributors to a shared process of knowledge production. The live-client brief examined in this study exemplifies this model by enabling students to influence both the process and the outputs of the task. Students engaged with service contracts used by the client in practice, interrogating its structure, identifying legal risks and proposing amendments that the client subsequently adopted. This constitutes epistemic co-creation, as

students were not merely applying knowledge but actively generating it in partnership with an external stakeholder.

PBL and its relationship to co-creation

PBL is an inquiry-driven pedagogy in which students work collaboratively to solve complex, open-ended problems (Billet, 2011; Bowater, 2024). Fostering critical thinking, adaptability and professional identity formation; emphasises student-led inquiry, self-directed learning and the application of theory to practice. However, it does not inherently constitute co-creation.

Key distinctions between PBL and co-creation

- **Task Design:** In PBL, the problem is typically pre-designed by educators. Students do not usually shape the task, criteria or knowledge being produced.
- **Authority:** PBL does not inherently redistribute power. Students collaborate with each other but do not typically influence the design or evaluation of the task.
- **Purpose:** The focus of PBL is on learning through problem-solving, not on partnership or shared curriculum design.

Thus, while PBL can create conditions conducive to co-creation, it is not co-creation unless students are involved in shaping the problem, the process or the outcomes.

Groupwork and simulations: adjacent but distinct

Groupwork and simulations are often used to promote collaboration and authenticity, but they differ fundamentally from co-creation.

Groupwork

Groupwork is a task structure, not a pedagogical philosophy. Students collaborate to complete a predefined task, but:

- the task is usually designed by the educator
- the criteria for success are externally imposed
- students collaborate with each other, not with staff or external partners in a decision-making capacity

Groupwork may be collaborative, but it is not co-creative unless students influence the design, purpose or evaluation of the task.

Simulations

Simulations replicate professional scenarios to provide experiential learning. They are powerful tools for authenticity, but:

- simulations are typically pre-constructed by educators
- students operate within predetermined parameters

- the goal is to practise skills, not to shape the learning environment or co-produce knowledge

Simulations can be authentic, but they do not inherently involve partnership or shared authority.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case-study methodology to explore how first-year law students experienced co-creation within a live-client brief embedded in a Level 4 Contract Law module. Case-study methodology is well suited to examining complex, context-dependent educational phenomena because it enables researchers to investigate processes, relationships and experiences in depth and within their natural setting (McKenney and Reeves, 2019). The live-client brief constituted a bounded system with clearly defined parameters: a specific module, a single industry partner and a cohort of students engaging in a structured, authentic learning activity. This made it an appropriate site for case-study inquiry.

The methodological aim was to generate rich, situated insights into how students understood their roles as co-creators, how they navigated collaborative knowledge production with an external partner and how the structural design of the live brief shaped their engagement, agency and learning. Co-creation is fundamentally relational and experiential; therefore, a qualitative approach was essential for capturing the nuances of students' perceptions, interpretations and meaning-making processes. The study did not seek to generalise findings to all contexts but to provide an in-depth account that could inform theory, practice and future research on co-creation in legal education and beyond.

Institutional context

The research took place within a 'new-style university', a term used in the United Kingdom (UK) to describe institutions with a strong widening-participation mission, vocationally oriented curricula and a strategic emphasis on employability and industry-integrated learning. This institutional context is pedagogically significant. Students often enter with diverse educational backgrounds, complex life commitments and varying levels of cultural capital. These characteristics shape how students engage with co-creation, particularly in activities involving external partners and authentic professional tasks.

The live-client brief was delivered in what the institution refers to as 'pilot classrooms': teaching spaces designed to trial innovative pedagogies such as team-based learning, problem-based learning and co-creation. These classrooms were selected deliberately to support collaborative work, flexible seating and dialogic teaching practices aligned with the aims of the live brief. The physical and pedagogical environment therefore formed an integral part of the case study, shaping how students interacted with each other, the client and the task.

Participants

Four students from a cohort of forty-one volunteered to participate in the study. Their demographic and educational diversity was central to the analysis. Two were mature students with caregiving and employment responsibilities and two were traditional first-year entrants transitioning directly from secondary education. These characteristics shaped students' experiences of agency, workload and group dynamics within the live brief. For example, mature students often balanced academic work with external responsibilities, influencing their availability for group meetings and client interactions. Traditional entrants, by contrast, were managing the transition to university-level study and developing confidence in professional communication.

Participation was entirely voluntary and no incentives were offered. The small sample size is consistent with qualitative case-study methodology, which prioritises depth over breadth. The aim was not to represent the entire cohort but to explore a range of experiences that could illuminate the complexities of co-creation in an authentic learning environment.

Data collection: semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection, because they offer a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to probe individual experiences in depth. We organised the interview schedule around five thematic areas informed by co-creation literature (Bovill, 2026; Cook-Sather, 2022) and by the pedagogical aims of the module:

1. Ownership and agency – how students understood their role in shaping the brief and its outcomes.
2. Group dynamics and participation – including challenges of equity, workload and accountability.
3. Authenticity and professional identity formation – how working with a real client influenced students' sense of legitimacy and confidence.
4. Perceptions of the educator's role – including facilitation, scaffolding and constraints.
5. Recommendations for future iterations – students' reflections on how the live brief could be improved.

Online interviews via Microsoft Teams served to accommodate students' varied schedules and responsibilities. Each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and anonymised prior to analysis. Conducting interviews online limited barriers to participation, particularly for mature students balancing a number of commitments.

Ethical procedures

Anglia Ruskin University granted ethical approval prior to data collection. An invitation, emailed to all students enrolled on the module, went out after the submission of their assessed work to avoid any perception of coercion. Interested students received a participant information sheet outlining the study's purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality measures and data-handling procedures. Participants signed an electronic consent form before taking part.

At the start of each interview, the researcher reiterated that participation was voluntary, that students could withdraw at any time without consequence and that all data would be anonymised. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reporting. The findings contain no information that will identify either the students or the external partner.

Researcher roles and reflexivity

A researcher who had not taught the module conducted the interviews; with power imbalances thus minimised, students could speak freely, confident that their comments would not influence academic judgement or jeopardise future learning relationships. The distinction between teaching staff and the interviewer was explained to participants at the outset.

Reflexive notes were kept throughout the research process to acknowledge the researchers' viewpoint and to ensure transparency in the interpretation of student narratives. Reflexivity was particularly important given the relational nature of co-creation and the potential for researcher assumptions to shape the analysis. The research team engaged in continuing discussions to challenge interpretations, identify potential biases and ensure that the analysis remained grounded in participants' accounts.

Data analysis

We analysed data by means of reflexive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase model (familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, theme refinement, theme naming and final synthesis) because it allows for both inductive and theoretically informed analysis. Codes were generated inductively from the data but interpreted simpler co-creation theory, enabling the analysis to remain grounded in participants lived experiences while also contributing to conceptual debates.

The final themes ownership, structural design, future cohorts, problem-based pedagogy and student agency emerged through iterative comparison across transcripts. The concluding themes, ownership, structural design, future cohorts, problem-based pedagogy and student agency, crystallised through an iterative, cross-transcript comparative process. Peer debriefing between the two authors refined the themes, so ensuring analytical rigour and coherence. Thematic analysis was particularly appropriate for this study because it enabled the researchers to capture the complexity of students' experiences and to identify patterns across diverse narratives.

Analysis and discussion

The analysis draws on four semi-structured interviews with students who participated in the live-client brief. Using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019), five interrelated themes were identified: ownership, structural design, future scalability, problem-based pedagogy, and student agency. These themes illuminate how students experienced co-creation within the live-client brief and how the structural and relational dimensions of the activity shaped their learning. The discussion situates these themes within the literature on co-creation, live-client briefs and authentic learning.

1. Ownership and epistemic partnership

A central theme across all interviews was the strong sense of ownership students felt over both the process and the outputs of the live-client brief. Students consistently described the experience as *“real,” “impact orientated”* and *“professionally relevant”*, emphasising that their work had tangible consequences because the client intended to use the revised contract in practice. This authenticity elevated the stakes of the task and fostered a deeper sense of responsibility.

One student explained that the brief *“felt real because the client actually used the contract”*, highlighting the shift from hypothetical learning to authentic engagement. This aligns with the literature on live-client briefs, which emphasises meaningfulness and impactfulness as defining attributes (Rodriguez et al., 2021). However, the live brief was aimed at professional development that is industry led and forgoing theory. Such a scope develops skills that student can pivot on in industry. Students were not merely completing an assignment; they were contributing to a professional artefact with real-world implications.

This sense of ownership reflects epistemic partnership, a core principle of co-creation (Bovill, 2020). Students were not passive recipients of knowledge but active contributors to its production. They interrogated the contract, identified legal risks, drafted amendments and justified their decisions to the client. The client’s adoption of several student-generated clauses reinforced the legitimacy of their contributions and strengthened their sense of partnership.

The interviews revealed that ownership was not only cognitive but also emotional. Students described feeling *“proud,” “trusted”* and *“valued”*, suggesting that co-creation fostered a sense of belonging and professional identity. This emotional dimension is often overlooked in discussions of co-creation but is critical for understanding how partnership reshapes pedagogical relationships

2. Structural design: enablers and constraints

While students valued the authenticity and autonomy of the live-client brief, they also identified structural challenges that shaped their engagement. These challenges related to timetabling, group dynamics, assessment clarity and the availability of structured support.

Timetabling and workload

Several students noted that the brief required substantial time outside scheduled classes, particularly for group meetings and client interactions. Mature students with caregiving or employment responsibilities found this particularly challenging. One participant explained that *“finding time to meet as a group was difficult”*, highlighting the tension between authentic learning and students’ complex lives.

This reflects broader concerns in the literature about the sustainability of live-client briefs, which require significant staff and student time (Clarke, 2018). Without institutional adjustment – for example, by arranging timetabled workshops or protected groupwork sessions – students may struggle to engage equitably.

Group dynamics and equitable participation

Students also discussed challenges related to uneven participation within groups. While some groups functioned effectively, others experienced issues such as unequal workload distribution, inconsistent attendance and differing levels of confidence. These dynamics influenced the quality of the final output and students’ experiences of co-creation.

One student’s comment that *“some people did more than others”* raises questions about fairness and accountability and echoes concerns in the literature about groupwork, which often lacks mechanisms for ensuring equitable participation (Potkin, 2019 & Rochon 2022). Co-creation requires shared responsibility, but, without clear structures, power imbalances may emerge within student groups.

Assessment clarity

Students expressed uncertainty about how their work would be assessed, particularly given the involvement of an external client. They asked whether the client’s preferences would influence grading and how individual contributions would be recognised. This uncertainty reflects the broader challenge of assessing co-created work, which must balance authenticity with fairness (Omland, 2025).

Students’ suggestion that co-designing assessment criteria with them would enhance transparency and ownership is much in tune with co-creation literature emphasising shared decision-making in assessment design (Bovill, 2020).

3. Future scalability and sustainability

Participants were enthusiastic about the potential for expanding live-client briefs across the curriculum. They believed that authentic, industry-integrated tasks should be embedded throughout the degree to enhance employability and professional identity formation. However, they also recognised the challenges of scaling such initiatives.

Client engagement and staff capacity

Students wondered whether the university could secure enough reliable industry partners to sustain live briefs across multiple modules. They also noted the significant workload for staff

in coordinating client relationships, designing briefs and supporting student groups. These concerns mirror the literature on sustainability, which emphasises the need for institutional support and clear role definitions (Bovill et al 2016)).

Consistency across cohorts

Students were convinced of the importance of ensuring consistent experiences across cohorts. They worried that variations in client engagement, task complexity or staff facilitation could lead to inequitable learning experiences. Shared frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms to support scalability are therefore a must.

Shared accountability frameworks

Participants suggested developing shared accountability frameworks to ensure equitable participation within groups and clear expectations for client involvement. Such frameworks could include role allocation, structured check-ins and transparent communication protocols; the literature on co-creation likewise emphasises relational accountability and mutual benefit (Cook-Sather, 2022).

4. Problem-based pedagogy and its intersection with co-creation

Although the live-client brief incorporated elements of PBL, students recognised that the activity extended beyond traditional PBL. Students described the brief as ‘open-ended’, ‘student-led’ and ‘collaborative’, thus reflecting core features of PBL (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). However, they also emphasised their influence over the process and outputs, distinguishing the brief from typical PBL tasks.

Moving beyond pre-designed problems

In PBL, the problem is usually pre-constructed by educators. By contrast, the live-client brief involved a real contractual document used by the client in practice. Students shaped the direction of the task by identifying issues, prioritising risks and proposing amendments. This level of influence reflects co-creation rather than PBL.

Negotiating meaning with an external partner

Students engaged in iterative dialogue with the client, negotiating the meaning and implications of contractual clauses. This relational dimension is absent from traditional PBL, where students typically work within the boundaries of a hypothetical scenario. The presence of an external partner transformed the task into a co-creative process.

Professional identity formation

Students reported that the live brief helped them “*feel like actual lawyers*”, suggesting that co-creation supported professional identity formation. While PBL can foster identity development, the authenticity and relational accountability of co-creation intensified this effect.

5. Student agency and professional identity

Student agency emerged as a pervasive theme across all interviews. Students described feeling empowered to make decisions, challenge assumptions and justify their reasoning to the client. This agency was not merely procedural but epistemic: students shaped the knowledge being produced.

Confidence and legitimacy

Working with a real client enhanced students' confidence and sense of legitimacy. One participant explained that the brief *"made me feel like I could actually do this as a job"*, so reinforcing the idea of co-creation as a bridge between academic study and professional practice.

Redistribution of authority

Students noted that the educator's role shifted from instructor to facilitator. This redistribution of authority is central to co-creation (Bovill, 2020). Students valued the autonomy to determine how their 'firms' operated, allocated roles and managed their workflow. This autonomy fostered a sense of ownership and accountability.

Challenges to agency

However, agency was not experienced uniformly. That some students felt constrained by group dynamics or were uncertain about expectations confirms that intentional scaffolding must support equitable agency across diverse student groups.

Synthesis: co-creation as pedagogic transformation

Taken together, the themes illustrate how the live-client brief facilitated co-creation by positioning students as epistemic partners, fostering ownership and enabling authentic engagement with professional practice. The brief moved beyond PBL, groupwork and simulations by embedding partnership at several levels and enabling students to influence both the process and the outputs of the task.

However, the findings also highlight the structural and relational challenges of co-creation. Authentic partnership requires intentional design, institutional alignment and sustainable support structures. Without these, co-creation risks becoming uneven, inequitable or unsustainable.

The study therefore contributes to debates on co-creation by demonstrating how live-client briefs can both operationalise partnership in early-stage legal education and identify the conditions necessary for sustainable, equitable and meaningful co-creation.

Conclusion

This case study has examined how a live-client brief embedded within a first-year Contract Law module facilitated co-creation between students, academic staff and an external industry partner. By analysing students' experiences through semi-structured interviews, the study demonstrated that live-client briefs can operationalise co-creation in relevant and

transformative ways, even within early-stage legal education where hierarchical norms and doctrinal rigidity often dominate.

The findings highlight the centrality of ownership in co-creative learning environments. Students experienced a strong sense of responsibility and epistemic legitimacy because their work had real-world consequences. The authenticity of a task engaging with a contractual document used in practice took students beyond hypothetical learning to participation in the co-production of knowledge; viz., with shared authority, relational accountability and recognition of themselves as epistemic partners, as identified by Bovill (2020) and Cook-Sather (2022).

However, the study also reveals the structural challenges inherent in co-creative pedagogies. Timetabling constraints, uneven group participation, assessment uncertainties and the lack of clear scaffolding all affected students' experiences; all of them may be countered by intentional design and institutional readjustment. Co-creation cannot be sustained through isolated innovations; it requires systemic support, including timetabled workshops, transparent assessment frameworks and mechanisms for equitable participation.

Students expressed enthusiasm for future scalability, recognising the value of authentic, industry-integrated learning across the curriculum. Yet they also acknowledged the practical limitations of scaling live-client briefs, particularly in relation to staff workload, client availability and consistency across cohorts. Their reflections point to the need for sustainable partnership models, shared accountability frameworks and institutional strategies that embed co-creation as a core pedagogical principle rather than an occasional enhancement.

The study further clarifies the conceptual boundaries between co-creation, PBL, groupwork and simulations. While the live-client brief incorporated elements of PBL and collaborative learning, it exceeded these models by enabling students to influence both the process and the outputs of the task. Co-creation was evident not only in the collaborative problem-solving but in the redistribution of authority, the negotiation of meaning with an external partner and the joint production of a contractual artefact. This distinction is critical for advancing theoretical clarity in the field.

Finally, the study clearly demonstrates that co-creation fosters student agency and professional identity formation. Students reported increased confidence, a sense of legitimacy and a clearer understanding of their emerging professional roles. These outcomes are particularly significant in widening-participation contexts, where students may enter HE with varying levels of cultural capital and professional exposure.

Overall, the study contributes to scholarship on co-creation, authentic learning and industry-integrated curriculum design by offering an empirically grounded, theoretically informed analysis of how live-client briefs can transform pedagogical relationships in legal education. It demonstrates that co-creation is not merely a pedagogical technique but a relational and ethical orientation that requires intentional design, institutional commitment and a willingness to reconfigure traditional hierarchies.

Future research could explore how co-creation operates across different disciplines, how assessment frameworks may be co-designed with students and how institutions may develop sustainable models for industry-integrated learning. For practitioners, the study offers a

scalable model for embedding co-creation in early-stage legal education and provides practical insights into the design, facilitation and evaluation of live-client briefs.

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