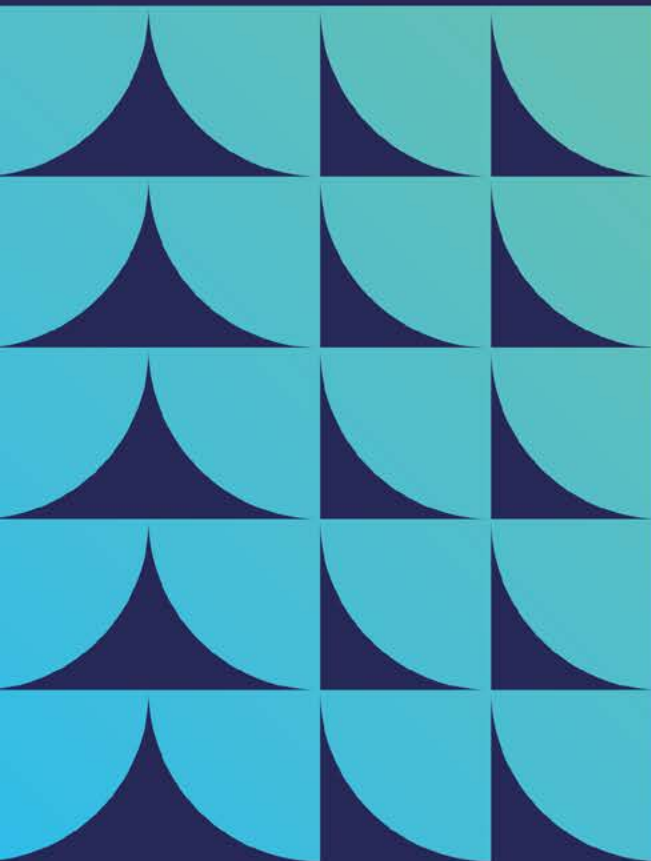


# Open Justice Centre Annual Report 2025



The Open  
University

Law School

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## Stay in touch

### Open Justice Centre

The Open University  
Walton Hall  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AA

### Francine Ryan

Centre Director  
[Francine.ryan@open.ac.uk](mailto:Francine.ryan@open.ac.uk)

### Jon-Paul Knight

Centre Manager  
[jon-paul.knight@open.ac.uk](mailto:jon-paul.knight@open.ac.uk)

### General enquiries

[open-justice@open.ac.uk](mailto:open-justice@open.ac.uk)

### Find out more at

[open.ac.uk/open-justice](https://open.ac.uk/open-justice)

LinkedIn: (27) The Open University Law  
School: Overview | LinkedIn

Bluesky: [@openjustice.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/@openjustice.bsky.social)

# Overview

The Open Justice Centre leverages the expertise of the OU Law School for public benefit. Since 2016 we have delivered a range of innovative online projects to harness the enthusiasm, commitment and expertise of our students and academics in ways that seek to reimagine the social justice mission that lies at the heart of The Open University's founding vision. That of being open to people, places, methods and ideas.

Over the last eight years we have produced research which demonstrates the currency and relevance of our work. Our focus on exploiting the potential of digital technologies to deliver high-quality

practical legal projects for students, whilst also providing meaningful support for individuals and communities, has captured the interest and imagination of the sector.

We are very pleased to share our 2025 Annual Report which provides an opportunity to highlight some of our key achievements resulting from the commitment and creativity of our students, Associate-Lecturers and community partners. We would like to thank everyone who continues to play a part in fostering the growth of the Open Justice Centre and are particularly grateful for the continued support of The Open University and to our growing list of external partners.



**Francine Ryan**  
Director



**Jon-Paul Knight**  
Centre Manager

## A four nations approach

The Open Justice Centre is unique in being able to engage with communities across the four nations of the United Kingdom. Whilst the majority of our students are based in England, we have a strong student base across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which has allowed us, with the support of the OU national offices, to develop a range of localised initiatives. This is in addition to our work on policy issues, legal advice and public legal education which reaches across national boundaries.

Recent activities have included a project for YouthLink Scotland as part of our W360: Justice in Action 'Policy Clinic' where our students' research was incorporated into a Scottish Parliament proposal bill which went live for public consultation in November 2024.

Another exciting project involves law students in Northern Ireland delivering interactive legal sessions to school children in Belfast as part of a nationwide 'School Tasking' project.



Our offices in Belfast (above), Edinburgh (left) and Cardiff (below).



# Open Justice Centre activities and 2024–2025 updates

## Open Justice Policy Clinic

**The Open Justice Policy Clinic undertakes research on behalf of organisations and charities.**

The Policy Clinic has now completed its sixth year and in 2025 students had the opportunity to work on two different projects. During their time in the policy clinic students gain experience of carrying out legal policy work for a charitable or third sector organisation. Students work on a brief provided by an organisation and carry out empirical research to produce analysis and recommendations, which can be used by the organisation to influence their policy work.



## 24–25 Policy Clinic Projects

Students in 2025 worked on an important projects for [The Josh Hanson Trust](#). The students, in partnership with Lancaster University and University of Lancashire students, prepared a report for the Trust on the [Unduly Lenient Sentence \(ULS\) Scheme](#). This report provides new evidence and data to support the campaign work of the Trust for stronger victims' rights.

Policy Clinic Lead Liz Hardie together with Centre Manager Jon-Paul Knight were invited to a Parliamentary event on Victims' Rights with The Josh Hanson Trust on Tuesday 14th October 2025 to talk about the students' report findings.

The event was sponsored and chaired by Mid Bedfordshire MP Blake Stephenson. Jon-Paul and Liz were on the panel addressing the six-year call for Josh's Law, which is the campaign to reform the ULS Scheme, and the Trust's manifesto which outlines the key policy goals and vision for a more victim-centred justice system.

You can read more about the project and its findings in a blog about the project at this [link](#).



Left to right: Jon-Paul and Liz are shown with Tracey Hanson (The Josh Hanson Trust) and Katrina Miles (University of Lancashire).



**More information about the Open Justice Policy Clinic's work can be found on our website**

**Policy clinic | Open Justice**

## Open Justice Business and Employment Law Clinic



The Business and Employment Law Clinic offers students the opportunity to engage with real-world employment and business law issues under the supervision of experienced academic and legal professionals.

For the first phase of the project, students attended a briefing in which Dona McLachlan (a former OU alumnus and now an employment specialist with Citizens Advice Dover, Deal and District) along with an Associate Lecturer (who sits as a judge in employment tribunals) shared their insights and experience of working in this area of law. Each group of students was then given an employment case study, based on a case that Dona was working on or on which she had worked recently, (anonymised to protect confidentiality). The groups were required to identify the key issues involved, research the relevant areas of law and produce letters of advice for the clients in question, under the supervision, and with the support of their tutor.



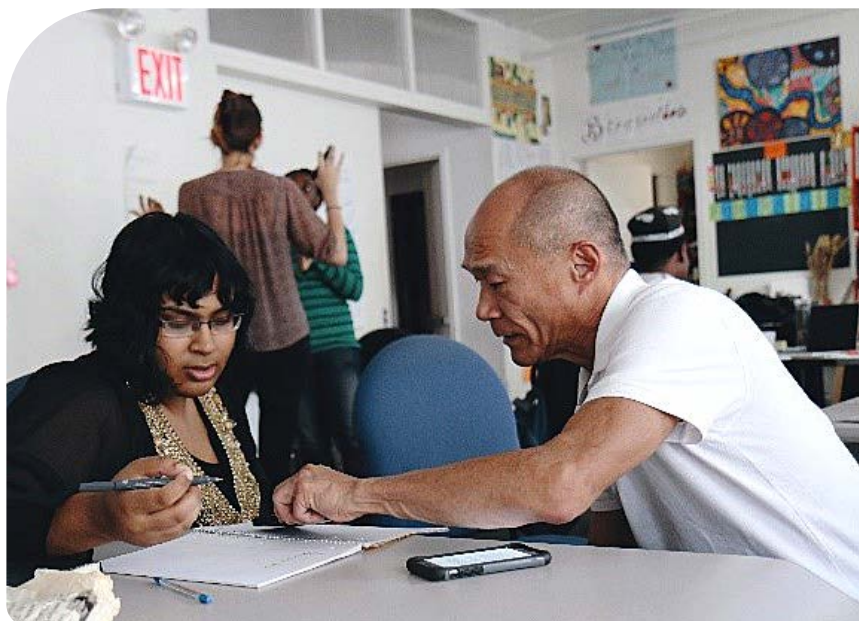
This phase of the project gave the students an insight into the range of employment issues that clients typically encounter and helped them think not only about the complexity of this area of law but the importance of clear, transparent communication with clients.

The Business Law phase of the project commenced in February 2025. In this phase the clinic's law students aimed to give pro bono legal support to OU students and recent alumni who have been selected for the [Open Business Creators \(OBC\) initiative](#). The OBC provides funding and other support to those who wish to start, or have recently started, a business.

The Law students met with a small group of OBC entrepreneurs to learn more about their businesses and the legal issues they have encountered and then researched the relevant legal areas and drew on legal design theory to produce interactive toolkits. These aim to provide clear, accessible and engaging guidance on the areas of business law identified by the entrepreneurs.

One law student said: "It is really exciting to hear that our toolkit will be published on the Open Justice Centre's website, ... we have all loved this module and working together," whilst the OBC supervisor, Rob Wilson, said: "Collaborating with the Law School on this has been a great experience for OBC. Everybody wins through this project."

The Toolkits can be accessed at the Business and Employment Law Clinic section of this page on our website [Open Justice Week 2025 | Open Justice](#)



## Open Justice Family Law Clinic

During 24-25, the Family Law Clinic provided students with a number of different opportunities to provide legal advice and information to members of the public about family law. All students worked on a project for [LawWorks](#), a charity committed to enabling access to justice through free legal advice. LawWorks [Free Legal Answers](#) is a website where individuals on a low income, and not eligible for legal aid, can request initial or brief advice about a specific legal issue. Working in a 'firm' of 3 – 5 students, the groups researched a specific family law query posted on the website and provided written advice for the client.

During the year the Clinic answered 14 different legal queries on a variety of topics, including disputes involving a child's upbringing, divorce, financial issues on separation and divorce, and cohabitant's rights when a partner dies. Examples can be accessed at the Family Law Clinic section of this page on our website [Open Justice Week 2025 | Open Justice](#)



Most students also provided advice to clients referred from [Suffolk Law Centre](#) with a family law problem. Twenty clients were referred with a variety of different legal issues, and the client was allocated to a student firm. The students attended the online interview with the client, which was conducted by a member of staff, and took notes. They then researched the legal issue and drafted a comprehensive written letter of advice for the client.

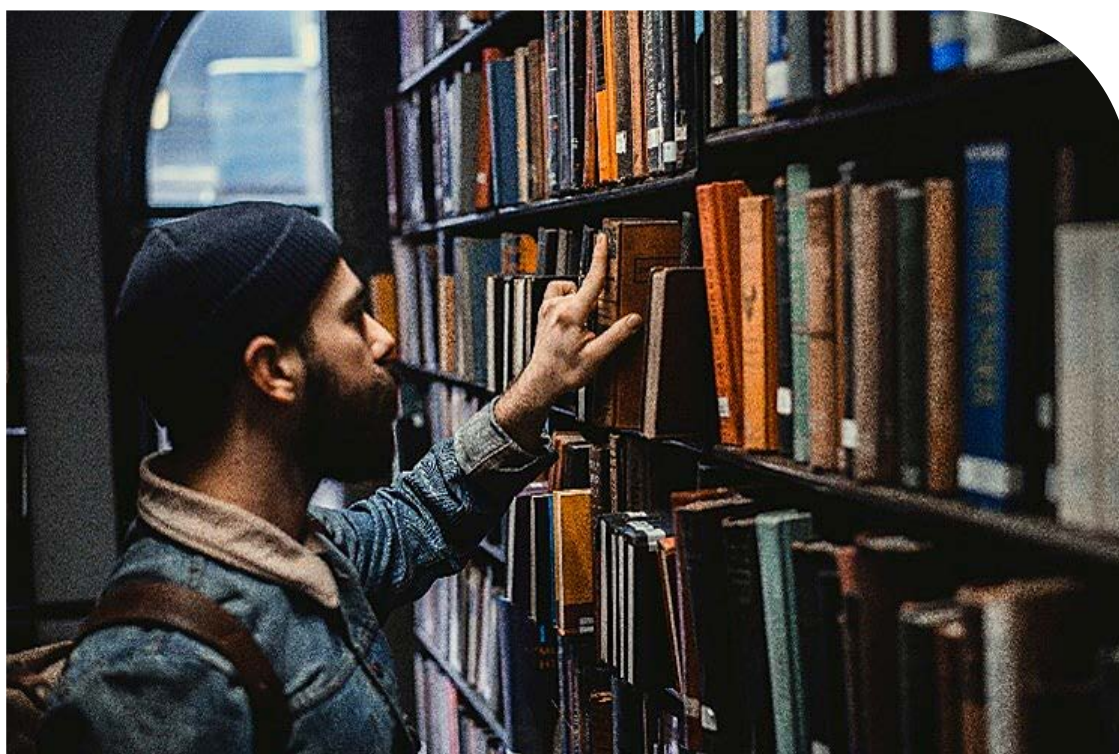
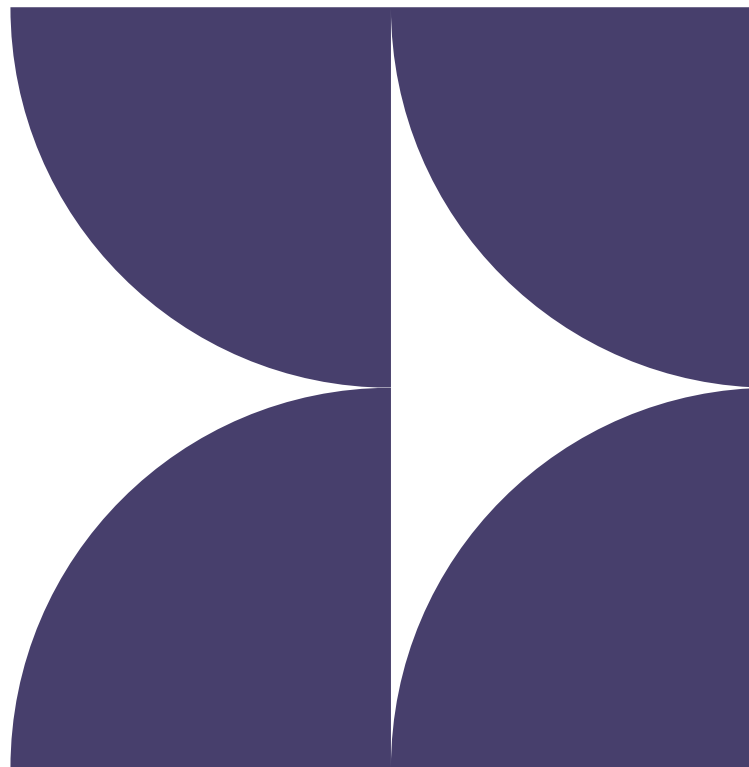
Three students also worked on an independent public legal education project. Public legal education aims to provide information on legal rights and remedies to members of the public in a clear, accessible and engaging way. The students drafted either a leaflet or poster which provided information on your legal rights if you are stalked or harassed by a former partner. The document included the legal remedies a person can take, as well as practical advice. This involved the students researching the area of law and practical advice, designing a leaflet, choosing artwork and explaining legal rights in an accessible way. An example of one of the leaflets produced can be accessed at the Family Law Clinic section of this page on our website [Open Justice Week 2025 | Open Justice](#)

## Law Reform Clinic

The Open Justice Law Reform Clinic gives students the opportunity to carry out research into an area of law being considered by the Law Commission and to make recommendations for reform.

This year, students responded to the Law Commission's consultation on the law of homicide and in particular the defences for victims of domestic abuse who kill their abusers.

The students produced reports entitled 'How does the presence of mental illness impact the legal defence strategies for victims who kill their abusers, and should psychological assessments be mandatory prior to determine these defences?'; 'When survival turns fatal: the need for legal defence in abuse driven homicide cases', and 'Project Report: A Comparison of the Legal Defences Available for Women Who Kill Their Partners as a Result of Abuse in England and Norway.' Students produced excellent work as part of this project.





## International Law

For the International Law Project students undertake a piece of practical legal work with an international focus. The exact nature of the work varies from year-to-year but usually covers international environmental law, human rights law, and / or humanitarian law. It may include legal work to assist an international non-governmental organisation, a community, or a group of individuals. The work might include legal research, reviewing documentation, taking witness statements, or drafting submissions to an international forum such as the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

Students are supervised by practising lawyers and given training to support their work. Training includes the relevant area of international law, their duties and responsibilities as practising lawyers, the ethics of international legal work, and how to deal with additional aspects of the work such as stress and challenging materials.

This year, the project partner was [Law Students for Climate Accountability \(LSCA\)](#), a high-profile NGO focused on informing and educating international lawyers about the consequences of their actions on the international environment.



Hickman and Rose, a legal firm based in London work with us on briefs for our international law project.

HICKMAN & ROSE  
SOLICITORS

## Criminal Law Clinic

During 2024 and 2025 students in the Criminal Justice Clinic researched a criminal appeal case under the direct supervision of a solicitor. The Clinic was shortlisted for the LawWorks and Attorney General Student Pro Bono award for Best New Pro Bono Activity in 2023.

Students considered the evidence and unused material on a live criminal case where the convicted defendant continues to protest their innocence. Students carried out research and applied legal principles to determine whether there were any grounds for referral to the Criminal Cases Review Commission or for an appeal to be made.

The cases involved a serious criminal offence. Students were provided with appropriate training on evidence, appeals and use of a case management system. The CJC pioneered 'vicarious trauma training' in legal education to protect students' mental wellbeing. Students obtained valuable legal, professional and collaboration skills.

In 2025/2026 this clinic has moved to work on projects around the legal profession and students are currently researching the psychological and emotional impact of exposure to traumatic cases, exploring legal and ethical responsibilities, and developing accessible materials that promote awareness, resilience, and well-being in the legal profession.

You can read a recent blog from a Criminal Justice student here [university.open.ac.uk/open-justice/blog/mandatory-vicarious-trauma-training-legal-eagles-when-lawyers-are-forced-face-emotional](https://university.open.ac.uk/open-justice/blog/mandatory-vicarious-trauma-training-legal-eagles-when-lawyers-are-forced-face-emotional)



## Legal Technology



Each year, students produce an array of incredible legal chatbots. Two of our students, Trevor Fletcher and Joanne Roberts, have written short blogs where you can learn about their experiences on the project and access the chatbots they built.

Click to read: [Trevor's blog](#) [Joanne's blog](#)

Students on the Legal Tech project design and build apps and chatbots using a platform developed by our STEM colleague and Associate Lecturer, David Byrne. Students are given a brief and then spend time researching the legal issues before they start designing their solution. Students are introduced to design thinking and explore the importance of human-centred design. This year some students also developed and tested chatbots using ChatGPT.



## School Tasking

In 2025 we were delighted to participate for the first time in the nationwide [School Tasking](#) project which is a research project created by the University of Warwick. The project aims to introduce Year 5 students (age 9 to 10) to legal concepts and encourage them to think about going to university in the future. The project is based on the television programme Taskmaster and is supported by the show's presenter Alex Horne. The project is specifically aimed at schools in less advantaged areas with specific eligibility criteria: schools must

have a higher-than-average percentage of pupils receiving free school meals and/or lower than average school progress scores.

With the assistance of one of our law students Fiona Donnelly who happened to be a Primary School Vice Principal at St. Mary's Primary School in Belfast four students delivered four 90-minute sessions in the school on a fortnightly basis between February and March 2025. These sessions introduced the Year 5 (Year 6 in NI) students to legal concepts through interactive games and activities.



Jon-Paul (right) with Ms Dawson and Miss Donnelly and the students – John Heaney, Richard McCann, Serah Satheesh, Shannon McCann and Larisa Vente at the Law Society of Ireland, Dublin

Classes are divided into teams who compete against each other in each of the sessions in a bid to be crowned their School Tasking winner. The ‘winning team’ from these sessions was invited to the Law Society of Ireland in Dublin, along with seven other schools from in and around that area, to compete in the regionals.

Open Justice Centre Manager Jon-Paul Knight attended the regional (and first All-Ireland) finals in Dublin on Wednesday 26 March.

Tasks included creating a stop motion film with Lego based on the famous [‘R v Dudley and Stephens’](#) case from 1884; completing a legal quiz to unlock a prize; and a popular final session which involved guessing chocolate bars blindfolded (to learn about copyrighting versus trademarking)... and possibly eating them afterwards!

Although ‘our’ school did not take the prize – this went to Dublin’s Stanhope Street Primary School (‘The Law Busters’) – they did win the quiz round, made a brilliant stop motion film and had a great day out.

The second year of School Tasking will take place in February and March 2026.

## Mentoring: UK Government Legal Department

2025 saw the eighth iteration of the Open Justice professional mentoring project. A result of close collaboration with the OU Careers and Employer Engagement team, we have succeeded in developing a prestigious link with the UK Government Legal Department which provides practising Government lawyers to mentor competitively selected students over a six month period. Sustained contact with UK Civil Service lawyers is an invaluable tool in raising our students’ career aspirations.



Government  
Legal Department

# W360: Justice in Action 2024-2025



[W360: Justice in Action](#) provides students with an opportunity to gain academic credit for participating in practical legal projects. Since 2017 we have supported approximately 2000 students through the module and related extra-curricular projects. During the module, students engage with topics of social justice, professional identity and legal ethics which help them contextualise their experience of engaging in practical legal work.

Student engagement in the practical legal projects has helped many secure scholarships and successfully progress into the legal profession.

# Legal technology



## Virtual courtroom 2025

The Open Justice Centre has developed an immersive virtual courtroom (VCR) that provides users with a realistic and interactive experience of modern courtroom environments. Initially designed to support OU law students undertaking advocacy and mooting, it rapidly became clear that the platform offers significant potential beyond higher education.

The VCR can support free legal advice organisations, litigants in person, and legal practitioners by improving preparation for hearings, as well as offering training opportunities for related professions such as policing and social work.





Unlike full headset-based VR, the VCR uses desktop virtual reality, making it accessible on standard computers without specialist equipment. Users can explore criminal and civil courtrooms, visit the judge's chambers, and the platform offers a unique opportunity to engaging in simulated hearings, providing an accessible introduction to legal processes.

Work in 2024-2025 has focused on enhancing both immersion and functionality; with further improvements to the platform and adding to its capabilities with the addition of a more complex explore mode, a tribunal court, additional meeting rooms and judge's chambers as well as cells and a security area to enhance the realistic and immersive elements. Work continues on a fully web-hosted version that can be used with internal and external partners without the need for software downloads.

In 2025, with funding from the [Scholarship Centre for Innovation in Online Legal and Business Education \(SCiLAB\)](#), we created a new simulation incorporating interactive escape-room challenges and quizzes to support Level 1 criminal law learning. The project evaluated how the VCR could enhance student understanding, engagement and application of core legal concepts.

## Cyberjustice Europe 2025

Dr. Francine Ryan and Jon-Paul Knight presented the virtual courtroom at the December Cyberjustice Europe 2025 in Strasbourg where we met fellow researchers and practitioners to share ideas and discuss collaborations. We feature in this short video [Cyberjustice Europe 2025: Are Immersive Technologies the Future of Justice? \(Highlights & Insights\)](#) created by Sébastien Meeùs from [@legalpixels](#).



To find out more visit our dedicated [website](#) as well as our [internal webpage](#) and if you want to get involved with this project, please email us at [open-justice@open.ac.uk](mailto:open-justice@open.ac.uk)

## AI, Law and Legal Training

The rapid growth of Generative AI (GenAI) since the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022 has transformed legal services, legal education, and public access to information. While these tools offer significant opportunities for improving efficiency and widening access to justice, they also raise important questions about ethics, risk, regulation, societal impact and AI literacy.



The Open Justice Centre is leading an 'AI, Law and Legal Training' project, funded by UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) Responsible AI UK, to produce research-informed resources to enhance the use of GenAI for understanding legal processes and accessing legal information.

Firstly, an interim report (that can be accessed [here](#)) was published in March 2025 based on the findings from three sector-specific workshops: legal profession, legal education providers, and the advice sector. This report was produced by Centre Director Francine Ryan and Liz Hardie with Daniel Gooch and Kevin Waugh from the STEM faculty, former Law School colleague Prof Kim Barker (now University of Lincoln) and Dan Barrett (Citizens Advice).

A free publicly accessible resource produced in partnership with Mishcon de Reya LLP was released – [Using generative AI in relation to legal issues](#).

Following the workshops eight free courses, aiming to support the legal and free advice sector in the ethical and responsible use of GenAI were developed and are now hosted on the universities [OpenLearn](#) platform. The courses have been designed for beginners, not only to help people understand how AI tools like ChatGPT work, but they also explore some of the opportunities and challenges around using AI tools for legal information and advice.

There are eight courses available:

- 1. Understanding Generative AI**
- 2. Skills and Strategies for Using Generative AI**
- 3. Key Considerations for Successful Generative AI Adoption**
- 4. Use Cases for Generative AI**
- 5. Ethical and Responsible Use of Generative AI**
- 6. Navigating Risk Management**
- 7. Legal Regulation and Compliance**
- 8. Horizon Scanning and AI Literacy**

Participants receive a digital badge and certificate upon completing a short quiz at the end of each course. To find out more and explore the courses go to: [OLCreate: AI Law and Legal Training | OLCreate](#).



## AI literacy

As AI systems become increasingly embedded in everyday life both at home and in the workplace, understanding how they function and the ethical considerations surrounding their use is essential. To support this, we have produced an AI literacy booklet that provides clear explanations, and practical guidance. It also includes direct links and QR codes to each of the OpenLearn courses, making it easy to share with staff, students, partners, and wider networks. There is an [online booklet](#) available; this resource can be circulated across organisations to support confident, informed, and responsible engagement with AI.

The courses were launched at an invitation-only workshop with experts and practitioners in London on Wednesday 25th June.

Lord Justice Birss (pictured), a Court of Appeal of England and Wales judge, delivered the keynote address followed by three panel discussions on AI and access to justice; and legal practice; and legal education.



Dan (right) chaired the first panel discussing AI and access to justice, while Kim Barker (left) chaired the next one on AI and legal practice. Liz Hardie chaired the third panel on AI and legal education which was last but definitely not least.



Work is ongoing to promote the courses across legal, advice, and community sectors, and to evaluate their impact through a recently launched [survey](#).



Francine was interviewed by Helen Vaux at Zoe Amar Digital about the AI Law project [Generative AI: The AI Law and Legal Training project - Zoe Amar Digital](#).

## Wise in 5

[PolicyWISE](#) is a unique UK and Ireland comparative policy, research, and knowledge exchange initiative that brings people and research together to find solutions to cross-nation issues facing policymakers.

They are UK and Ireland by design (working across The Open University's unique four nations base), supporting policymakers and researchers across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge.

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to public policy issues across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you to be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read)

The Wise in Five: AI Literacy briefing that we have created (available [here](#)) compares policies across the UK and Ireland. It finds progress in some nations but highlights gaps and inconsistencies that risk leaving people unprepared for the opportunities and challenges of AI.

## Open learning and short courses



In May 2024 the OU Law School launched the third in a series of immigration law courses developed in partnership with [HJT Training](#).

These courses offer comprehensive online training for those working in Immigration Law and are designed to be of particular interest to anyone with an interest in immigration law and especially helpful for those considering becoming an immigration adviser.

The courses '[Foundations of UK immigration law: IAA Level 1](#)' and '[Advanced UK immigration law: IAA Levels 2 and 3](#)' are designed to develop knowledge and skills relevant to immigration practice and provide an opportunity for individuals to prepare for the IAA (Immigration Advice Authority – formerly known as Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC)) exams at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

['Foundations of UK immigration law: IAA Level 1'](#) is currently the faculty's most popular short course. There is also an ['Introduction to UK immigration law and becoming an immigration advisor'](#) which is a free taster course on OpenLearn.



The courses were designed and delivered by Carol Howells (production lead), Edwin Parks, Sue Abood and Open Justice Centre Manager, Jon-Paul Knight, in collaboration with our external partner [HJT Training](#).

For more information on the open educational resources and short courses offered by the Open Justice Centre and the OU Law school visit our dedicated [webpage](#).

# Public engagement



The Centre website is a source of updated information about our activities, public access to the online law clinic, knowledge exchange, events and news.

## The Open Justice Centre blog



[www.open.ac.uk/blog/openjustice](http://www.open.ac.uk/blog/openjustice)

The Open Justice Centre blog is where students, alumni, team members and wider OU staff in associated areas of the University (and anyone that wishes to apply) can publish writing that is accessible to the public. The blog is incorporated into our website and visitors have the option to sign up for a monthly newsletter that details recent blog posts.



### Mandatory vicarious trauma training for legal eagles - when lawyers are forced to face the emotional thunderstorm

Criminal Justice Clinic students Gabriella Coe, Cliff Johnson, Ruth Mansell, Harriette Eden, Charlotte Grayson and Jennifer Whewell reflect on vicarious trauma training in this new blog.

3rd March 2025

## Social media accounts

The Open University Law School launched its dedicated [LinkedIn](#) account in 2025 which we have been using to promote events, student activities, webinars, news coverage and blog posts. We also have a Blue Sky account but are increasingly using LinkedIn as our primary social media platform.





## Open Justice podcast

We were proud to launch the Open Justice Centre Podcast in June 2025 – a new platform to spotlight voices and stories from across our community.

The OJ Podcast will feature conversations with students, alumni, partner organisations, law academics, and OU staff, focusing on pro bono work and efforts to improve public understanding of the law.

In the inaugural episode our 2025 Intern Stacy-Jane Haigh spoke with OU Law Student Steven Sutherland, who shared his inspiring journey of studying law as a sight-impaired student. The [second episode](#) featured Stacy-Jane in conversation with OU Law alumni Sonia Seran who talked about founding the organisation SEN Law which provides an advocacy service for SEND parents to access support and navigate educational provision using the law, as well as her experiences of studying with the Open University.

New episodes are being produced at the moment for release in Spring/Summer 2026.

## Employability Week 2025

During Employability Week which took place in July 2025 the Law School and the Careers and Employability Services brought together a fantastic programme of speakers from a range of different sectors and job roles who talked about their career, their OU studies and navigating the world of work.

It was a great opportunity to learn from our inspirational alumni and other speakers to increase knowledge and understanding of different career options, sectors and roles. Each session was hosted by academics from the Open Justice Centre.

You can access the full playlist of webinars from the 2025 Law School Employability Week at this link [Law School Employability Week 2025 – YouTube](#)



## Open Justice Week

In 2025 we celebrated our eighth annual e-festival of public legal education, [Open Justice Week 2025](#). Every June the Centre has showcased the excellent work of our law students studying the W360: 'Justice in Action' module and students who volunteer for the projects on an extra-curricular basis.

We featured six of our student projects with links to a selection of the resources and reports the students produced as well as student blogs written especially for the week.

Open Justice Centre Director Francine Ryan said: "We are incredibly proud of our law students and the amount of time and hard work they dedicate to our Open Justice projects. Their commitment is making a tangible difference to the communities and organisations we work with."



# Award shortlists and nominations in 2024–2025

## Open Justice Student Awards 2025

Our annual awards are given to individual students or groups of students that make outstanding contributions to the projects they are involved in. Students are nominated by their tutors or project managers.



## Outstanding individual contribution to Open Justice (Iain Service Awards)

This year four students were awarded the 'Iain Service Outstanding Individual Contribution' award. The award is named in tribute to and memory of [Iain Service](#), former 'Justice in action' student, Open Justice Centre volunteer and Law School alumni.

### Adam Hare – Individual winner

As a SiSE (Students in Secure Environments) student Adam was given his own project which involved creating public legal education resources (PLE) for either fellow prisoners or people that need more information on their legal rights. The goal for these projects is for SiSE students to create and develop resources that can educate and inform peers about key legal issues. These resources can include pamphlets, posters, handouts, or other accessible materials that are appropriate for their particular audiences.

Tutor Paul Dale who nominated Adam for the award said:



*Adam is a SISE student with HMP Highpoint. Throughout the project Adam has gone above and beyond what is expected for the project. He has shown real passion for his work. He has held several workshops with other offenders, delivered several presentations and produced extensive library resources on the topic of recategorisation, in particular where prisoners want to apply for Cat D (Open Prison). He has also delivered presentations on the issues related to IPP (Indeterminate) Sentencing, which is an ongoing issue across prisons. After the submission of the reports, he has written a blog post for the Inside Times prison magazine to disseminate some of this work. Additionally, Adam has regularly received Band 1 grades for his TMAs.*





## Delia Nadine Chin - Individual Winner

Delia took part in the Legal Technology Project Clinic which offers students the opportunity to project design and build apps and chatbots using a platform developed by our STEM colleague and Associate Lecturer, David Byrne. Students are given a brief and then spend time researching the legal issues before they start designing their solution. Students are introduced to design thinking and explore the importance of human-centred design. This year some students also developed and tested chatbots using ChatGPT.

Delia was nominated by her tutor Mark Hayward who said:



*'Delia maintained a positive approach to her project and produced a really polished and useful chatbot that should be able to help a vulnerable set of people in the real world.'*



You can read a blog written by Delia about winning the award [here](#)

Delia praised the experience saying:

*I'm genuinely delighted and deeply honoured to receive the Iain Service Award for outstanding individual contribution. Thank you very much for this lovely recognition and for the opportunity to be part of the Open Justice Activities this year!*

*Getting involved in these projects has truly been a wonderful journey for me. It's helped me understand access to justice even better and has really inspired my future career ambitions. At the moment, I'm excited to be working with a charity to expand my chatbot to reach more people.'*





## Joanne Roberts – Individual Winner

Joanne also took part in the Legal Technology Project Clinic which offers students the opportunity to project design and build apps and chatbots. You can read a blog written by Joanne about winning the award [here](#) as well as finding out more about the chatbot in a second blog written by Joanne [here](#).

Joanne was nominated by project leads Francine Ryan and David Byrne.

Francine said:



*'Not only did Joanne work incredibly hard, developing an impressive chatbot drawing on key principles of legal design. She was also incredibly supportive of other students sharing her knowledge and experience to help them develop their chatbots.'*



Joanne praised the experience saying:

*'Being part of the Open Justice Project helped me connect the dots between legal education, digital design, and social impact. It showed me that technology can do more than inform, it can empower. It also reminded me how vital it is to design legal tools that are clear, accessible, and genuinely user-friendly. The experience has reshaped my future plans. I'd originally set my sights on becoming a solicitor, but working on this project and seeing the difference well-designed tools can make has opened a new path.'*

## Kristina Mann – Individual Winner

Kristina took part in the Policy Clinic project which offers students the opportunity of gaining experience by carrying out legal policy and advocacy work for a charitable or third sector organisation or to influence government policy.

Kristina was nominated by her tutor Avril Martin who said:



*'Kristina despite challenges, showed resilience and high ethics by carrying on with the project almost single handed doing extra work including research to cover the others, analysed to a high level and wrote the report herself. With the remaining other student Kristina was kind and supportive providing guidance so that the other student did engage at the end and really benefited from Kristina's kind help. Kristina was outstanding in her efforts liaising with the tutor project lead and carrying on.'*



Kristina praised the experience saying:

*'Thank you very much for such amazing news!! I am so pleased and honoured to know that all my hard work was so valuable!'*

## Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice

**Team winners : Zion Amodu, Vimbai Francine Makore, James Heavey, Tomas Jearrad, Ray Boothby, Katherine Leydon, Bryce McLaughlin**

The 'Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice' saw a group of seven win in this year's awards for their work on the International Law Project. For the International Law Project students undertake a piece of practical legal work with an international focus. The exact nature of the work varies from year-to-year but usually covers international environmental law, human rights law, and / or humanitarian law. It may include legal work to assist an international non-governmental organisation, a community, or a group of individuals.

This year, the project partner was [Law Students for Climate Accountability \(LSCA\)](#), a high-profile NGO focused on informing and educating international lawyers about the consequences of their actions on the international environment.

The team were nominated by the Project Manager Paul Troop who said:



*The group researched a fascinating topic, namely Aboriginal rock art that preserves a continuous history over many thousands of years, and how it is being destroyed by environmental pollution. They conducted and wrote up an insightful interview with one of the key researchers and specialists in this area and wrote a compelling and moving blog of the topic.*



Group member Tomas Jearrad said:

*"Participating in the international law Open Justice project presented sufficient opportunities to apply legal knowledge to real-world situations whilst making a notable difference for our client. The project provided a crucial perspective in applying theoretical ideas to practical situations, which has been instrumental in my skills development and ultimately my post-graduate career. My participation has allowed me to demonstrate to employers that I possess key legal skills that will give me a helping hand in my role. Critical reflection is a foundation throughout the project, and this aspect has increased my self-awareness, allowing me to be mindful of my ongoing post-graduate skills development. The project also demands a concerted effort to working amongst a team to achieve a common goal and thus provided a great opportunity to share ideas with fellow students, whilst simultaneously building positive relationships. I would thoroughly recommend participation in the Open Justice projects to any student that would like to apply some of the knowledge and skills amassed over the initial years of study, to engaging real-world legal scenarios, whilst developing legal skills that are invaluable to any career."*



# Lectures, conferences, workshops and events

The Open Justice Centre team have contributed to a wide range of online and face to face national and international public engagement events this year.



Pictured above at the conference, left to right, are: Head of the Law School Hugh McFaul, Emma Curryer, Lesley Allan (solicitor, Kennedys Law LLP), Fin Young (journalist) and Gillian Mawdsley.

## MARCH 2025

### **'Vicarious Trauma Education and the Legal Profession Now and in the Future', OU in Scotland – Edinburgh**

This conference was organised by Emma Curryer and Associate Lecturer Gillian Mawdsley on behalf of the Open Justice Centre, with support from the OU in Scotland.

It considered increasing knowledge and understanding of the effects of vicarious trauma ('the exposure to traumatic stories and experiences of others through work') on the legal profession.

The subject matter was a first for the Law School and the OU in Scotland, with the conference only possible due to funding from the Clark Foundation for Legal Education. Staff and students from the OU and other universities were joined by lawyers, barristers and advocates, the judiciary, representatives from various Scottish justice institutions, and other interested groups including from the victim-perspective.

# UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

## APRIL 2025

### Socio-Legal Studies Association Annual Conference – Liverpool



Kate Ritchie presented a paper at the Socio-Legal Studies Association Annual Conference, alongside former Open Justice academic Siobhan Cullen, on their research on legal education for

students in secure environments (SiSE) which discussed the enablers and barriers.

## SEPTEMBER 2025

### 17th Global Legal Skills Conference at Masaryk University, Brno– Czechia

Francine Ryan and Liz Hardie both presented papers at the conference, Francine presented her research on graduate attribute and Liz presented a paper 'Using ChatGPT in university law clinics: a blessing or a curse?'



## SEPTEMBER 2025

### The Role of AI in Legal Education: Preparing the Next Generation of Lawyers– Westminster Law School

Francine Ryan and Liz Hardie presented a paper 'Bridging the Justice Gap: Educating Law Students on AI Literacy' as part of a session on AI use in the context of legal education.

## OCTOBER 2025



### Legal Aid Practitioners Group Conference – London

Francine was part of a panel at the Legal Aid Practitioners Group (LAPG) conference along with Matthew Howgate, Rohini Jana and Giles Peaker discussing the growing impact of AI on the legal aid sector.

## NOVEMBER 2025

### “Pro Bono in the Age of AI: A Launchpad for Next Gen Lawyers” London and Online

Francine Ryan was a panelist for an event with [qLegal](#), Field Fisher and Baker and McKenzie titled “Pro Bono in the Age of AI: A Launchpad for Next Gen Lawyers” discussing how pro bono is the perfect platform to test and develop AI literacy and other practical and ethical considerations.



# Research outputs

The Centre is also committed to producing high quality research.

Some highlights are given below, and a full list of published articles (including student research) is available on our website's [research page](#).



NOVEMBER 2025

## Student Belonging Community of Practice – Online



Carol Edwards and Kate Ritchie presented at the online Student Belonging Community of Practice (a collective of HE institutions who have an interest in belonging). The paper entitled “WhatsApp and

Student Engagement: Reimagining Peer Mentoring in the Digital Age” shared their work on developing a peer mentoring programme within the Law School.



Liz Hardie, Kate Ritchie, and Carol Edwards joined host of the Praxis Podcast Dr Olivia Kelly to explore a pioneering peer mentoring initiative at the Open University. Faced with low engagement on traditional forums, the team piloted WhatsApp communities to support new law students with transformative results.

## Research Projects 2025/26



### Working together to map Fair Access in Scotland

The Open Justice Centre together with the Department for Policing and SCiLAB are working on a research project with The Carnegie Trust for the Universities in Scotland and The Robertson Trust for their project to map 'Fair Access'.

By September 2026 this aims to deliver a comprehensive mapping of Scotland's Fair Access landscape. It will be of critical importance in addressing fragmentation, improving evidence-based policy, and strengthening widening access to higher education for learners facing barriers.

### Victim Support Scotland



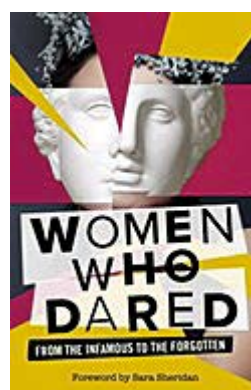
The Open Justice Centre and Department for Policing, together with OU in Scotland support are working with Victim Support Scotland (VSS) on a project to research types of unmet support needs which exist among people in Scotland who have been impacted by crime.

By July 2026 the team aims to develop an understanding of the types of support needs being met or otherwise and provide a means of categorising and understanding these support needs. It will be of critical importance in enabling VSS to widen the scope of the charitable support provided to victims of crime.

## Recent publications by Open Justice Centre authors

### Women Who Dared: From the Infamous to the Forgotten

Francine Ryan's contribution on the Victorian writer, poet and social reformer Caroline Norton to a new book, ['Women Who Dared: From the Infamous to the Forgotten'](#), has been published by Edinburgh University Press in September 2025.



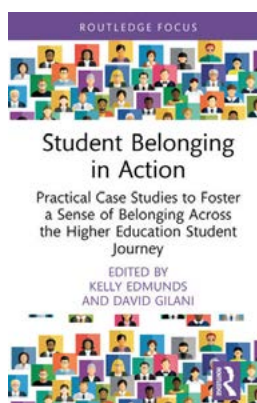
Francine Ryan and David Byrne have contributed a chapter on 'Open justice and legal tech' to ['How To Apply Game-Based Learning in Legal Education'](#), published in 2025 via Edward Elgar Publishing.

This innovative How to Guide brings together pioneering educators to explore the integration of gaming into the law classroom, edited by Steven Montagu-Cairns (University of Leeds), Craig Newbery-Jones (Birmingham City University) and David Yuratich (University of Exeter).



Open Justice Centre colleagues **Liz Hardie**, **Carol Edwards** and **Kate Ritchie** together with **Jennifer Harper**, **Emma Bassett** and **Suz Corcoran** – have had a book chapter published, 'Build a sense of belonging in online learning environments'. This is based on a case study of the Law Belonging Project, Business Belonging Project and Law mentoring project.

It has been published in '[Student Belonging in Action: Practical Case Studies to Foster a Sense of Belonging Across the Higher Education Student Journey](#)' by Routledge, edited by Kelly Edmunds and David Gilani.



An article by **Carol Edwards**, **Liz Hardie** and **Kate Ritchie** has been published in the Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change. From the Law School level one peer mentoring project, it is called '[WhatsApp reaches the students other peer-mentoring schemes cannot reach: A case study exploring the experiences of using WhatsApp for online peer-mentoring support](#)'.



The Bar Council

**Francine Ryan's** blog, '[On course to build confidence in AI among legal professionals](#)', was published by The Bar Council in November 2025.

## Scottish Legal News

Associate Lecturer **Gillian Mawdsley** wrote a blog, '[Champion the cause of vicarious trauma education](#)'. The title was inspired by one of the speakers at the Law School conference – 'Vicarious Trauma Education and the Legal Profession Now and in the Future' – hosted at the OU in Scotland office in Edinburgh in April 2025.

### More published articles from Open Justice authors in 2024 –2025

- **Ryan, Francine; Hardie, Liz; Gooch, Daniel; Waugh, Kevin; Barker, Kim and Barrett, Dan** (2025). [AI Law and Legal Training: Interim Report](#). The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK.
- **Ritchie, K** (2025) '[Educating Prisoners: The Importance of Relationships!](#)'
- **Ryan, Francine and Hardie, Liz** (2024). [ChatGPT, I have a legal question? The impact of Gen AI tools on law clinics and access to justice](#). International Journal of Clinical Legal Education, 31(1), pp. 166–205.
- **Edwards, C., Hardie, L. and Ritchie, K.** (2025) '[WhatsApp reaches the students other peer-mentoring schemes cannot reach: A case study exploring the experiences of using WhatsApp for online peer-mentoring support](#)', The Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change, 11(1)
- **Curryer E and Mawdsley, G** (2024) [Navigating Vicarious Trauma: The Importance of Planning, Teaching, and Delivering Vicarious Trauma Training to Support Law Students and the Legal Profession](#) | International Journal of Clinical Legal Education ([northumbriajournals.co.uk](http://northumbriajournals.co.uk)), International Journal of Clinical Legal Education

# Centre staff and contacts

## Open Justice Virtual Intern 2025/26



In 2025 we recruited our fourth virtual intern Delia Chin to assist us with the continuing production of a legal podcast that was started by our former intern Stacy-Jane Haigh.

We recruited Delia through advertising to undergraduate law and business school students, shortlisting and

interviewing them in the usual way.

Delia started in January 2026 and is with us until May, during which time we are hoping Delia will gain useful new skills and knowledge in research, preparing for and delivering podcast interviews as well as gaining some useful insights into how we set up and manage student projects and work on new developments in legal technology as a university.

## Open Justice Research Associate



Lorraine (Lorrie) Hayman (she/her) is a Research Associate with the Open Justice team at The Open University, where she has been supporting projects on AI and the Law throughout 2025 and 2026.

Lorrie is also a doctoral researcher at the Centre for

Global Women's Studies at the University of Galway, funded by Research Ireland, examining Online Violence Against Women. In addition, Lorrie serves as Fieldwork Lead for a European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights project assessing Ireland's implementation of the Digital Services Act. She volunteers with the Galway Rape Crisis Centre and founded the peer support network for early-career researchers at the University of Galway.



## Associate Lecturers and project support 2024-2025

Open Justice is an incredible team effort. We work in partnership with our tutors, colleagues, consultants and alumni to deliver our pro bono projects. We want to thank everyone for their commitment and support.



Francine Ryan, Centre Director: [Francine.ryan@open.ac.uk](mailto:Francine.ryan@open.ac.uk)

Jon-Paul Knight, Centre Manager: [jon-paul.knight@open.ac.uk](mailto:jon-paul.knight@open.ac.uk)

General enquiries to: [open-justice@open.ac.uk](mailto:open-justice@open.ac.uk)



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**Find out more at**  
**[open.ac.uk/open-justice](https://open.ac.uk/open-justice)**  
**Email: [open-justice@open.ac.uk](mailto:open-justice@open.ac.uk)**  
**LinkedIn: (27) [The Open University Law School: Overview | LinkedIn](#)**  
**Bluesky: [@openjustice.bsky.social](#)**

**The Open Justice Centre** The Open University Law School, Michael Young Building,  
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA