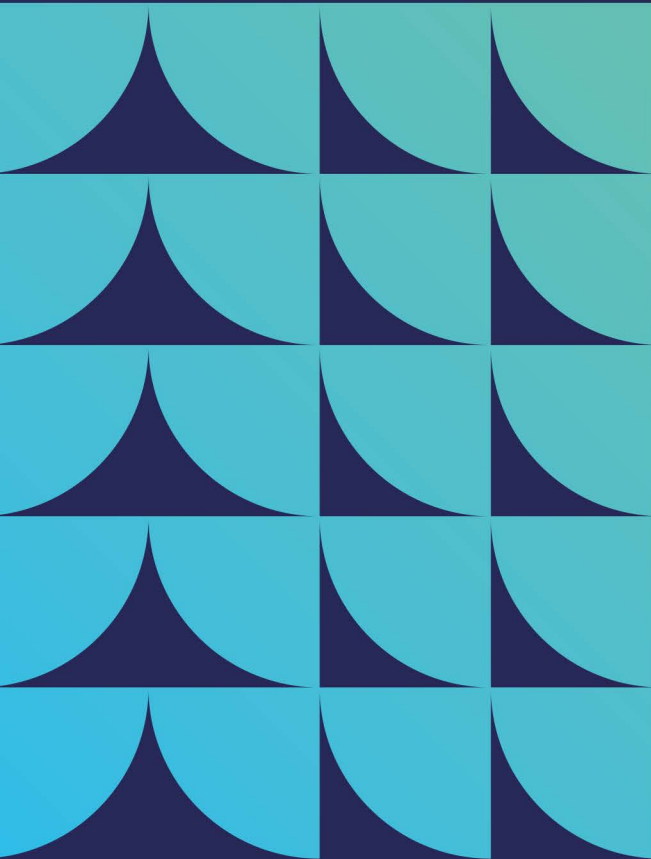


# Open Justice Centre Annual Report 2024



The Open  
University

Law School

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# 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 and offline 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 2024 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. The majority of our students are based in England, but a healthy proportion of our student base is drawn from 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 online 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 2023–2024 updates

## Open Justice Policy Clinic

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

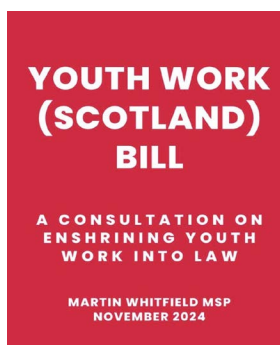
The Policy Clinic has now completed its fifth year and in 2024 students had the opportunity to work on three different projects. During their time in the policy clinic students gain experience of carrying out legal policy work for a charitable or third sector organisation. Students work on a brief provided 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



## 23–24 Policy Clinic Projects



One group of ‘Justice in action’ students worked on a project for [YouthLink Scotland](#), the national agency for youth work in Scotland. They asked the policy clinic to research Scotland’s current youth work provision and explore what this might look like, focusing on whether the Scottish Parliament should introduce a right for all young people to access quality youth work provision. The research identified the current state of youth work provision in Scotland and whether there are any gaps; what the impact of a right to youth work and/or strengthened CLD Regulations would have upon youth workers in Scotland; and what legislative changes would be required to implement a right to youth work in Scotland. An abbreviated version of their report can be seen by clicking on the following [link](#).



In November 2024 we were thrilled to hear that the student’s work was incorporated into a Scottish Parliament proposal for a Youth

Work (Scotland) Bill which went live for public consultation that month. Some of the international comparisons which our students researched are on public record (page nine onwards) in the [consultation on the Bill](#).

Kevin Kane, Policy and Research Manager at YouthLink Scotland, said: ‘It’s momentous for the students to have helped normalise the discussion and have such a tangible link to emergin public policy.’



A second group of voluntary students worked on a project for [PACT \(Prison Advice and Care Trust\)](#), a national charity that supports prisoners, people with convictions, and their children and families. PACT is carrying out some research into the experience of women in prison, including the support they both need and have access to, how effective this is and how their experience might differ with male prisoners. They asked the policy clinic to analyse the anonymous case studies / case notes from women prisoners to summarise the recurring themes in answer to these questions and suggest where any gaps in services may be. An abbreviated version of their first report can be seen at this [link](#). PACT asked further questions based on the original report, and some of the students carried out further research to provide a second supplementary report, which can be found at this [link](#).



A third group of voluntary students worked on a project for The Harbour, a non-for-profit organisation which offers alternative education and support for children aged 11-15 years who struggle to cope in schools. They asked the policy clinic to carry out research into the way in which support can be provided to these children, including those who are currently not attending school; those who have a Local Authority Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) with no named school; and those who are currently registered at a local authority school but struggling to attend. The research identified the number of children aged 11 – 15 years who were not currently registered at a school because of their school not being able to meet their needs; or with an EHCP with no named school; or who are regularly not attending their registered school and whether this is increasing, static or decreasing in the last ten years, and after COVID. They researched whether local authorities and schools are open to working in partnership (including providing funding in cases where they are legally responsible for the educational provision) with alternative education providers to support these children, and the implications of supporting those children in terms of legal structure, safeguarding, regulatory responsibilities and accountability to the local authority, schools and/or OFSTED.



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

**Policy clinic | Open Justice**

## Open Justice Business Law Clinic

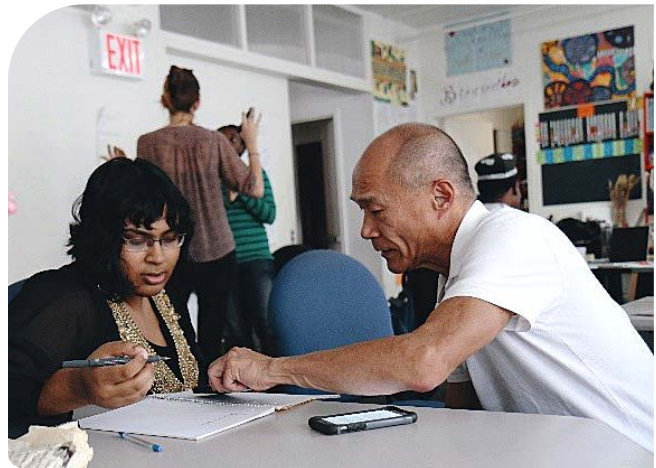
In 2024 students in the Open Justice Business Law Clinic created video or narrated visual presentations to support the clients of [St Giles Trust](#).

**St Giles**

Turning a past into a future

St Giles Trust is a charity that supports people from disadvantaged backgrounds, some of whom may be interested in starting their own business.

Each presentation provided information and guidance on a key legal issue for a small business (for example, formalities in setting up such a business). This project provided an opportunity for the students to develop legal design and oral presentation skills as well as continue to build on their research skills and think about how to present complex legal concepts in a way that is clear, accessible and visually engaging.



## Open Justice Family Law Clinic

The Open Justice Family Law clinic gives students an understanding of family law and the experience of putting their academic knowledge into practice. The clinic worked with three not-for-profit organisations.

Students worked on a project for [LawWorks](#), a charity committed to enabling access to justice through free legal advice. One of the ways they do this is through LawWorks [Free Legal Answers](#), a website where individuals on a low income, and not eligible for legal aid, can request initial or brief advice about a specific civil legal issue from a volunteer lawyer.

**Law  
works**

LawWorks asked the Family Law Clinic to research and write standard answers to a

variety of common family law legal queries, which they will keep as a template to respond to queries. The answers needed to cover both the law and any practical advice needed. An example of one of the answers provided by the family law clinic students can be found at the following [link](#).

Students worked on two projects for [PACT](#), a national charity that supports prisoners, people with convictions, and their children and families. In the first project, students carried out research into the experience of women

in prison, including the support they both need and have access to, how effective this is and how their experience might differ with male prisoners. They asked the family law clinic to analyse the anonymous case studies / case notes from women prisoners and to summarise the recurring themes in answer to these questions and suggest where any gaps in services may be.

The charity supports women in prison, and where these women are also mothers, there are often family law proceedings relating to the care of the child with family members, or contact with them, whilst they are in prison. This often requires the women to complete an application form for a child arrangements order (CAO). As legal aid is only available in very limited circumstances for family

law cases, the women have to complete the forms as litigants in person with the support of PACT social workers.

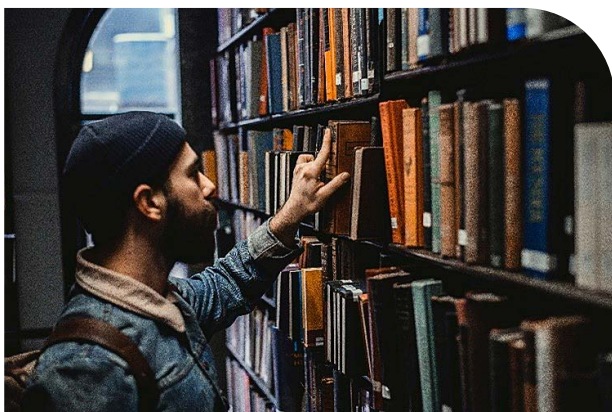
C100 forms are used to apply for a court order to manage arrangements for a child. Although the government provides guidance on how to fill out this form, staff and service users struggle to understand these documents as they use a lot of specialized language. In the words of one of the PACT staff 'unless you have a degree in law, the document is a bunch of nonsense'. In the second project students drafted a document for the women prisoners and PACT workers to explain how to complete the C100 form. Some examples of their work can be found at the following links [here](#) and [here](#).

## 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. Students were able to choose from four Law Commission projects which were at the pre-consultation stage.

One group of students researched the law relating to financial remedies on divorce, comparing the law in England and Wales with the law in Australia, which is more rules-based and less discretionary. Their report was forwarded to the Law Commission as part of their call for evidence. An abbreviated copy of their report can be found [here](#).

Another group of students chose to research contempt of court rules, looking at different aspects of the current law. This included comparative research looking at other countries' rules regarding contempt of court, and analysis of the current rules, cases and secondary sources. Two groups' reports were forwarded to the Law Commission in July 2024 when it opened. Our submission has since been acknowledged by the Law Commission and will be reviewed as part of the preparation of their final report. Abbreviated copies of the student reports can be found at the links [here](#) and [here](#).



## Employment Law Clinic



The Open Justice Employment Law Clinic project offers students an opportunity to engage with real-world business and employment law issues under the supervision of experienced academic and legal professionals. Students work with free advice organisations to provide legal information to people facing employment issues and draft resources to support small businesses. This year our students produced three posters that dealt with three particular employment law issues (employment rights and dyslexia, pregnancy and maternity rights at work and unfair dismissal). Please click on the links below to see examples of the posters. *(Please note that this work has been produced by Open Justice students in March 2024 and should not be relied upon for legal advice. Please consult a legally trained professional or organisation such as your local [Citizens Advice](#) or [ACAS](#) for advice on your specific circumstances).*



**Employment rights and dyslexia**

**Pregnancy and maternity rights at work**

**Unfair dismissal**



## 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.

### 23-24 International Law Projects

In 22-24 the students worked with Law Students for Climate Accountability to survey and analyse strategic lawsuits against public participation (“SLAPPs”) and judicial harassment, including injunctions and prosecution against climate protesters. The goal was to identify law firms that were serial offenders as well as identifying potential mechanisms for preventing judicial harassment and holding lawyers accountable. The teams looked at a number of jurisdictions including the UK, USA, and Australia. Examples of two reports are available [here](#) and [here](#).

**HICKMAN & ROSE**  
SOLICITORS

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



## Criminal Law Clinic

In the Criminal Justice Clinic students research and advise on live criminal cases 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 consider the evidence and unused material on a live criminal case where the convicted defendant continues to protest their innocence. Students carry out research and apply legal principles to determine whether there are any grounds for referral to the Criminal Cases Review Commission or for an appeal to be made.

The cases involve serious criminal offences such as murder, manslaughter, serious assault, and drugs cases, amongst others. Students are provided with appropriate training on evidence, appeals and use of a case management system. The CJC is pioneering 'vicarious trauma training' in legal education to protect students' mental wellbeing. Students obtain valuable legal, professional and collaboration skills whilst the client obtains a well thought out advice on their case.

You can read two recent blogs from Criminal Justice students [here](#) and [here](#).

### Criminal Defence Milton Keynes

*Criminal & Prison Law*

This project is run in collaboration with our partner CDMK, specialist criminal solicitors with social justice at their core, often representing the most vulnerable in our society.



## Legal Technology

In the Open Justice Legal Tech project, students design and build apps and chatbots using a no coding platform. Students identify an access to justice and conduct research before designing their solution. Students are introduced to design thinking and explore the importance of human centred design.

Each year students produce an array of incredible legal chatbots:



### Chloe Connor

Chloe created a [chatbot](#) that helps people with legal guidance on purchasing a property:

*"My chatbot was developed to advise individuals on the legal process of buying a property, whether it is their first time or not. I saw conveyancing as an untouched subject when it came to legal advice that needs to be addressed - my chatbot aimed at closing such gap. My experience with the Open Justice Legal Tech, was profound. Without the education and awareness through The Open University, I would be unaware of the variety of methods pro bono can be offered and access to justice achieved. This was a thoroughly enriching and enjoyable module using technology creatively, that I would take time and time again if I had the opportunity."*



### James Richards

James was inspired by his own experience to create his [chatbot](#) Harvey which gives guidance on landlord's rights.

*"This project gave me a small but powerful insight into how legal technology can help people. After my time with the OU I now know, of course, that lack of knowledge and understanding present as a massive barrier to access to justice. Hardly a surprising point given my prior experiences. Furthermore, research led me to reading about public interest organisations that create apps for this very issue, with features such as dispute resolution tools and chat functions. The legal world is embracing the positive impact that technology can have, this will only continue to grow, and I really enjoyed getting some experience into how that can work."*

*I have always enjoyed technology and therefore it was an easy choice when deciding on my project for the Open Justice Module. Working with the Josef platform was very enjoyable and to me it showed that there is in fact more humanity in these chat bots than we sometimes believe. I carefully wrote every single word, the empathy and care in those words are genuine, the responses are human and the desire to help is real. Lastly, having the opportunity to apply my years of legal studies to an area that I've always enjoyed was a wonderful and rewarding experience."*



You can see some more examples of student chatbots on our [project archive page](#).



## School Tasking

This year we are delighted to be participating 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.

We decided to focus on Northern Ireland as there were currently no school tasking teams in that country and as luck would have it, one of our law students happened to be a Primary School Vice Principal at St. Mary's Primary School in Belfast. They will be the first school in Northern Ireland to take part in the project with hopefully more schools across all four nations coming on board in the future.

School tasking consists of four 90-minute sessions delivered in a school on a fortnightly basis between February and March 2025.

Our law students are responsible for delivering and leading the four sessions in the school. The sessions introduce the Year 5 (Year 6 in NI) students to legal concepts through interactive games and activities.

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. There are also opportunities for high-scoring winning teams to go onto compete in the Regional (held in Dublin for Ireland and NI groups) and National (Warwick) rounds of the competition.

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.

## Mentoring: UK Government Legal Department

2024 saw the seventh 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 sixth month period. Sustained contact with UK Civil Service lawyers is an invaluable tool in raising our students' career aspirations. This year is the largest cohort so far with 21 mentors and 26 students taking part.



Government  
Legal Department

# W360: Justice in Action 2023-2024



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 1,800 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.



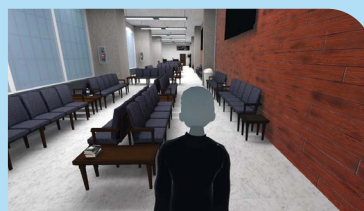
**“My participation in the Open Justice (W360) activities have been one of the most transformative experiences of my academic journey. It not only enhanced my understanding of the law but also gave me profound insight into the practical, human impact of legal work. This realisation has deeply influenced both my future academic and career aspirations”**

Daniel Davis  
2023 'Justice in action' student



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

# Legal technology



## Virtual courtroom

The Open Justice Centre has created an immersive virtual courtroom (VCR) that gives users a realistic experience of a modern courtroom within which they explore a typical court environment and interact with others to undertake courtroom advocacy (mooting).

Developed initially with our students in mind, it quickly became clear there are many possibilities for the VCR beyond an educational setting. The VCR has the potential to support free advice organisations and litigants in person with preparation for court hearings. It could also be used to facilitate training for legal professionals and other professionals such as the police and social workers.

The VCR uses desk top VR, which unlike full immersion VR uses a virtual interface which means it is accessible on a computer and does not require a headset. The VCR is an immersive, and interactive platform that is designed to educate users about the justice system and facilitate participation in simulated legal proceedings. Users can explore a criminal and civil courtroom and visit the judge's chambers to learn about courts and legal processes. Additionally, the platform offers a unique opportunity for users to engage in mock hearings.

Work in 2023-2024 focused on refining the platform and adding to its capabilities with the addition of a criminal court, an interactive tutorial, improved exploration mode and a web-hosted version, as well as constantly improving the graphics and usability. We also continued to test with diverse user groups and presented our findings together with colleagues from Policing and Social Work at internal workshops, external events and international conferences.

The Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) grant we received in 2023 enabled a one-day workshop in March 2024 in London to explore how the VR Courtroom technology can improve the experience of litigants representing themselves.

The workshop brought together organisations and professionals from across the sector including LawWorks, Support Through Court, members of the Bar Council offices, interested law firms and charities who have a deep understanding of the challenges faced by people representing themselves in court. The workshop feedback was used to design and develop further resources, as well as strengthening relationships with potential partners.

In 2024 we secured £5K from the Pan-University scholarship project to assemble a cross-disciplinary team including academics from the Open Justice Centre, Policing, Social Work, and Criminology which explored the use of the virtual courtroom in teaching and learning.

The project brought together students from each of these areas to practise courtroom presentation skills through an interdisciplinary simulated court hearing.



Ahmed Kadry – Senior Lecturer, Policing and Simon Hull – Lecturer in Work-based Learning (pictured) presented a paper on this project at the 16th International Conference on

Education Technology and Computers in Porto, Portugal, in September and won best presentation for their session. They showcased the virtual courtroom and its impact as a learning tool for law and policing students. As students find the virtual courtroom immersive and realistic, the team are now exploring the next stages in expanding its use.

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)

RelImagineLAW

Open Justice Centre Director Francine Ryan guested on the [RelImagine Law](#) podcast to talk about its innovative Virtual Courtroom and how technology is impacting on the legal profession and legal education. The discussion touched on the challenges and future potential of emerging technologies.

## AI Law and Legal Training

The rapid advancement of Generative AI (GenAI) has brought about significant change across industries, including the legal sector. Since the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022, the possibilities for AI tools to support legal processes and improve access to information have grown exponentially. However, these developments also bring challenges, particularly around ethical use, societal impact, and accessibility of training.



In 2024 Francine Ryan and Liz Hardie from our Open Justice Centre, in collaboration with colleagues in STEM, Daniel Gooch and Kevin Waugh received funding from [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) and [Responsible AI UK](#).

The team will produce research-informed resources which will enhance knowledge, awareness, confidence of, and use of, Generative AI (GenAI) for understanding legal processes and accessing legal information.

The OU is working in partnership on this project with a former Law School colleague, Professor Kim Barker (now at the University of Lincoln), and Citizens Advice. This national organisation supports the public with legal information and guidance in person, on the phone and via online support.

citizens  
advice

**Dan Barrett, Head of Data Science at Citizens Advice, said:**

“At Citizens Advice, we want to provide advice fit for the future and to help people find their way forward, whoever they are, and whatever their problem. We’re pleased to be collaborating with The Open University on this project to look at ways AI can help people across our service, including our network of local Citizens Advice”.

**Centre Director Francine and colleague Liz said:**

“This work will help educate and empower the public, legal advice organisations, small and medium law firms, students and academics by explaining GenAI, its application, implications, and ethical use in legal contexts. Learners will be empowered through open access, engaging online courses which will provide ethical and responsible knowledge of, and skills to use, GenAI.”

More details about the progress of the project as well as a downloadable briefing note written in partnership with Mishcon De Reya that provides a short introduction to GenAI is available at this link [Using generative AI in relation to legal issues | Open Justice](#)



Open Justice team members also lead on a second generative AI project with Senior Lecturer in Law Liz Hardie, as principal investigator. Liz was awarded funding in 2024 by [NCFE's Assessment Innovation Fund](#) for her research project 'Developing robust assessment in the light of Generative AI developments'. Faculty colleagues Francine Ryan (Law) and Claire Maguire (Business) are co-investigators, together with nine others from across the OU.

The project looked at the impact of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) on different types of assessment and recommended that universities should focus on better assessment design, rather than trying to detect misuse of generative AI tools.

Researchers analysed more than 900 scripts across 17 different types of questions and found that GenAI is capable of achieving a pass grade, and sometimes higher, on almost all types of assessments. It performed highly for the lower levels (FHEQ Levels 3 and 4) answers, with performance reducing as the assessments increased in difficulty through levels five and six.

The study also found that the methods that have previously been used to detect plagiarism do not work for AI. Although training the markers to improve detection did increase their ability to find AI use, it also increased the number of false positives – the incorrect identification of students answers as AI.

## Which way to turn?

### More on AI and access to justice

Francine Ryan spoke at a panel convened by Which? at the AI Fringe 2025 event in London in February.

Francine discussed 'AI and access to justice' as part of the session's overarching theme on the impact of artificial intelligence on consumers.

Which? the UK's consumer association, is bringing together experts from across online dating, legal services, financial services and children's online protection for 'AI Slop? Consumers Say No!'.

'Slop' is the term used for low-quality media, including writing and images, made using GenAI technology. With consumer trust vital to tech adoption, much of our current experiences are with things like chatbots making unsafe recommendations and AI ramping up online fraud.



A launch event in September 2024, in conjunction with the funder (NCFE's Assessment Innovation Fund), was the first of many internal and external events to over 700 people. This included an early start involving universities from Australia, New Zealand and the USA; two separate occasions with the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU); and a workshop as part of the Association of Colleges' annual conference in Birmingham.

The not-for-profit national organisation known as JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) has also included a [case study](#) about the research on its website.

Liz Hardie said *"We are grateful to NCFE for supporting this research and are excited to share our findings. This research will support higher education institutions in thinking about how to adopt AI-informed approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment."*



To find out more and read the full report, visit [Our Assessment Innovation Fund pilot with The Open University | NCFE](#).



## Open learning and short courses

In May 2024 the OU Law School launched a new short course that explores the complexity of UK immigration law.



The course, 'Advanced immigration law', is designed to develop knowledge and skills relevant to advanced immigration practice. It also provides 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 2 and 3.

This is the third in a series of immigration law courses developed by the Law School with ['WG001 Foundations of UK immigration law'](#) 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 new course has been 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](#).



In October 2024 the Open Justice Centre launched a new Open Learn free course ['Carrying out research for policy and advocacy work'](#) based on extracts from the updated version of 'Justice in Action'. The course is designed for anyone involved in law reform or policy work, explaining how to design, carry out and present research to support your policy project as well as clear and effective evidence to support proposals.



# Public engagement

 Open Justice Centre website  
[www.open.ac.uk/open-justice](http://www.open.ac.uk/open-justice)



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.



### Same course, but different now

Martyn Fryer, former 'Justice in action' student and now Criminal Justice Clinic case worker writes about his experiences both as a student and supporting students.

25th March 2024

## Social media accounts

We have moved from X to [Blue Sky](#) where we have continued to promote events, student activities, webinars, news coverage and blog posts. Student blogs and the annual 'Legally Christmas' blog series in December were popular as well as Open Justice Week.



## Open Justice Week

In 2024 we celebrated our seventh annual e-festival of public legal education, [Open Justice Week 2024](#). 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 had six student blogs and updates from our projects.

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."

## Open Justice Week 2024



# Award shortlists and nominations in 2023–2024



In July 2023 the Open Justice Centre were proud to be awarded an Open University 'Recognition of Excellence in Teaching Awards' in recognition of our 'outstanding contribution to learning, teaching and the student experience at The Open University'.

The process was demanding with each submission required to evidence the value, impact and reach of their work against specific principles of the OU's Teaching and Learning Plan. All applications were independently scored and collectively considered by the Review Panel, consisting of representatives from all four faculties, the Institute for Educational Technology (IET), Academic Services and Learner and Discovery Services (LDS).

Team members Jon-Paul Knight, Liz Hardie, Carol Edwards and Kate Ritchie are pictured above with the other award winners at the awards ceremony held in Milton Keynes in November 2024.

Four projects from the Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) won awards with a further team highly commended. Law Open Justice member Liz Hardie was involved with three of the winning law projects.



**"The success and recognition of our colleagues benefits not only them but also our students and the broader academic community. It serves as a beacon for academic excellence and ensures that universities remain centres of inspiration and learning."**

**Kara Johnson**  
FBL's Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching



# Open Justice Student Awards 2024

Each year, The Open Justice Centre celebrates the exceptional achievements of our students. 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 Award) | Stephen Cross, Amy Beck

Stephen Cross was the winner of the 'Iain Service Outstanding Individual Contribution' award, with Amy Beck as runner-up.

### Stephen Cross – Individual winner

Stephen took part in the Open Justice Law Reform Clinic.

Tutor Liz Hardie who nominated Stephen for the award said:

*“Stephen faced some challenges but wrote an excellent report, which was selected to be sent to the Law Commission”*

#### Liz Hardie

Tutor



### Amy Beck – Individual winner runner up

Amy took part in the Open Justice Employment Law Clinic and was nominated by her tutor who said:

*“Amy demonstrated high levels of professionalism and effective leadership throughout the Employment Law project. Amy chaired meetings efficiently, provided clear support to her fellow students, had a clear focus on the final products being produced and provided effective direction and support to ensure that these were completed to a high standard. The quality of the products prepared is testament to the leadership Amy demonstrated.”*

#### Martin Jones

Tutor

Amy praised the experience saying:

*“My time on W360 and the employment law project was incredible. It was an amazing opportunity for which I am extremely grateful to the OU for providing as part of my studies. Being able to develop new skills and put into practice what I learnt throughout my law degree was truly invaluable. It was great getting to know and work closely with other students on the project, and I can honestly say one of the highlights of my study journey. The whole employment law project team were amazing support throughout. I am so grateful to have even been nominated for an award so to be the runner up for outstanding individual contribution is such an honour. Being an OU student has truly changed my life and I will forever be grateful for this. Thank you to everyone at the OU.”*

#### Amy Beck

## Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice | Daniel Davis, Lucy Wilson, Omose Agboaye, Graham Hewitt, Natalie Rushton, Celeste Blaize-Gibson, Christian Alexander Pitt

The 'Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice' saw a group of seven win in this year's awards for their work on the Open Justice Policy Law Clinic.

The team were nominated by both their Tutor Avril Martin and the Project Manager Debbie Legge who said:

*"The students did a study for Youth Link Scotland on current youth work provision, exploring what this might look like and focusing on whether the Scottish Parliament should introduce a right for all young people to access quality youth work provision. They attended a conference by Youth Link Scotland, designed a survey and then analysed the results well, making great use of different forms of presentation. The report they wrote for Youth Link Scotland hardly needed any changes and Youth Link Scotland said, "thanks to you and all the students for the diligent work, I can see a lot has gone into this."*

### **Debbie Legge**

Project Manager



Group member Omose Agboaye (pictured) said:

*"The Open Justice policy clinic was by far one of the most interesting modules to partake in during my studies. I gained a deep understanding of the merits and challenges of working with colleagues in a Pro-Bono context. If you let yourself dive in there is a first-rate experience to be had in real policy research & writing. The emphasis on critical reflection I am finding is exceedingly useful just months into my career after graduating."*

### **Omose Agboaye**

Group member Graham Hewitt said:

*"The Open Justice project I was involved in looked at the provision of Youth Work in Scotland. We encountered many enthusiastic people who were motivated, knowledgeable and resourceful, but frustrated that they couldn't do more. If the obstacles could be eased by making the process more frictionless, many social issues could be resolved."*

### **Graham Hewitt**



Group member Daniel Davis said:

*"I'm incredibly honoured to receive the Open Justice Award 2024 for Best Team Contribution to Open Justice. It's been a privilege to collaborate with such a dedicated team, working together to promote access to justice and make a meaningful impact. A huge thank you to The Open University for this recognition—it's truly inspiring to be part of a community that values fairness, opportunity, and the power of education.*

*My involvement in the youthwork project in Scotland, which focused on providing legal assistance to vulnerable groups aged from 12 years of age, was especially impactful. Working within this team allowed me to see firsthand how critical lawyers can be in ensuring access to justice for all, regardless of financial means or social standing. As I move forward, I do so with a clearer sense of purpose: to use my skills to serve, empower, and advocate for those who need it most."*

**Daniel Davis**

Group Member

## Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice runners up

The runner up group this year were five students nominated for the outstanding work they produced for the Family Law project.

### Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice runners up | (Family Law Clinic): Noah de Hoogh, Jennifer Edwards, Kris Johansson, Lauren Streeter, Zishan Zaman

Tutor Liz Hardie, who supervised their work said:

*"This group were exceptional in the way they worked together and supported each other in the family law clinic. They worked on three questions for the LawWorks organisation and were keen to receive a fourth or to carry on working into the summer."*

**Liz Hardie**

Tutor



Team member Zishan Zaman (pictured) said:

*"I am grateful that the OU gave us a chance to help those who may not be able to access legal services due to financial issues or lack of knowledge on how to access these services. It gave us all a chance to give back to the community."*

# 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.



Open Justice Centre Manager Jon-Paul Knight pictured far right at LawtechUK's Access to Legal Workshop in London, 2024

## FEBRUARY 2024

### Level 1 and 2 Open University Law Conference – Manchester



Francine Ryan delivered the keynote speech to the conference entitled: 'Why should law students care about advancements in technology'- the presentation explored the developments of AI in legal education and practice.

## MARCH 2024

### Developing the Ministry of Justice's strategy for legal support – London

Francine Ryan attended an invitation-only conference for stakeholders in London which explored the various challenges facing the legal support sector and what can be done collectively to ensure the legal support system best meets user needs. This will help to inform the policy development of the Ministry of Justice's strategy for legal support and support the Lord Chancellor and senior judiciary's shared vision for the future of the civil and family courts and tribunals system.





## APRIL 2024

### Association of Law Teachers (ALT) Conference – University of Swansea



Open Justice team members Emma Curryer and Carol Edwards (both pictured) presented on 'Employability Outcomes in Clinical Legal Education: What do Students Feel

They Have Achieved by Participation in a Digital Criminal Justice Clinic?' on the first morning of the Association of Law Teachers (ALT) Annual Conference in April.

On the second day, Carol Edwards, Liz Hardie and Kate Ritchie presented their paper, 'WhatsApp! Refreshes the Students Other Peers Couldn't Reach'.

## MAY 2024

### Reimagining Legal Education in the Age of Generative AI workshop – University of Birmingham

Francine Ryan was a keynote speaker at the University of Birmingham's 'Reimagining Legal Education in the Age of Generative AI' in May. The workshop explored the opportunities and challenges for generative AI (GenAI) in legal education, reimagining assessment and thinking about some of the practical ways GenAI is incorporated into the law curriculum.



## JULY 2024

### Manchester Law and Technology Conference

Francine Ryan was a panellist at the Manchester Law and Technology Conference hosted by LawtechUK and the University of Manchester. Francine discussed AI and access to justice along with startup founders, legal professionals, investors and government officials.



## JULY 2024

### Advance HE's 'Artificial Intelligence Symposium 2024: AI Journeys – Being Human' – Manchester

Francine Ryan presented her paper on 'The robustness of Assessment in the light of generative AI' at Advance HE's 'Artificial Intelligence Symposium 2024 with colleagues Jonquil Lowe and Mirjam Hauck'.

## JULY 2024

### Barriers To Effective Public Legal Education – Designing Solutions Roundtable'

**Mishcon de Reya**  
It's business. But it's personal.

Francine Ryan presented her paper on 'The robustness of Assessment in the light of generative AI' at Advance HE's 'Artificial Intelligence Symposium 2024 with colleagues Jonquil Lowe and Mirjam Hauck.communities'.

## SEPTEMBER 2024

### All-Hands Meeting of Responsible AI UK (RAI UK) – Cardiff

Francine Ryan attended the first All-Hands Meeting of Responsible AI UK (RAI UK) in September.

Six 'Skills' projects, including AI, Law and Legal Training (AILLT) which Francine is leading, were formally announced on the day.

RAI UK is a £33m UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded programme which started in May 2023. It brings together more than 200 researchers from across the UK's four nations and beyond to understand how and why we should shape the development of AI to benefit people, communities and society.

## OCTOBER 2024

### The Chinese University of Hong Kong guest lecture



香港中文大學

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Francine Ryan delivered a guest lecture, 'Exploring legal academics, law firms and law graduates' views on graduate attributes', to The Chinese University of Hong Kong in October. Her paper examined graduate attributes within the discipline of law, drawing on 43 interviews with legal academics, law firms and law graduates from the UK.

## NOVEMBER 2024

### Responsible AI Skills workshop – University of Glasgow

Francine presented at the Responsible Ai UK Skills Workshop, held at the University of Glasgow, it was an inspiring gathering of innovators, industry leaders, AI professionals, and researchers, that sparked meaningful discussions and collaboration around building the skills needed for a future driven by ResponsibleAI.





## NOVEMBER 2024

### LawtechUK's Access to Legal Workshops – London and Online

Francine Ryan and Jon-Paul Knight (pictured) attended LawtechUK's Access to Legal Workshops in November. The goal at each workshop was to collaboratively create a problem statement to build connections between access to justice organisations and tech companies, law firms and other corporates.

LawtechUK is a Ministry of Justice (MoJ)-backed initiative dedicated to driving digital transformation in the legal sector, delivered by CodeBase and Legal Geek.

## DECEMBER 2024

### OU China Training Event



Liz Hardie and Francine Ryan participated in the two-week OU China training event held in December. Twenty-three educators from OU China who are studying the application and innovation of digital education, and enhancement of education quality visited Milton Keynes between 2nd and 13th December. Liz and Francine delivered a 3-hour workshop on Generative AI and Education.



# 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](#).

## Recent publications by Open Justice Centre authors



### The Law Society Gazette, 6 June

Associate Lecturer and Open Justice team member **Gillian Mawdsley** writes about '[D-Day: The Inns of Court Regiment and the solicitors who fell](#)'. The commemoration of the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the allied landings which began the Normandy campaign, provided an opportunity to consider the role that members or those involved with the legal profession played in these seismic events.

## THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

### The Conversation, 31 May

Senior Lecturers in Law **Francine Ryan** and **Liz Hardie** discuss their recent study, published in the *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education*, in which they [asked chatbots including ChatGPT for legal advice](#) (and highlight five reasons why you shouldn't!).

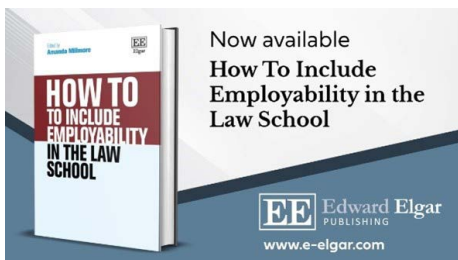
# LawCare

Lecturer in Law and head of department **Emma Curryer** and Associate Lecturer **Gillian Mawdsley** have had their article, '[Let's debate: The need for vicarious trauma training to support the legal profession](#)', published on the website of LawCare, a mental health charity for the legal sector. This was also then picked up by [Scottish Legal News](#) (23 February).



## Effective wellbeing support for Law students

**Liz Hardie** and **Francine Ryan** have a chapter, 'How to offer effective pastoral support in a distance learning institution', in a new book called [How to Offer Effective Wellbeing Support to Law Students](#) which is being published this month by Edward Elgar Publishing.



## Another important 'How to...'

**Emma Curryer** and **Carol Edwards** have had their book chapter, 'Innovative ways of developing communities and enhancing students' employability skills in the online university environment', published in [How to Include Employability in the Law School](#) (edited by Amanda Millmore, published by Edward Elgar).

# AdvanceHE

**Carol Edwards** and **Liz Hardie** shared their approach to combating isolation and fostering a sense of belonging in the distance-learning environment at the OU Law School. The blog, '[Enhancing distance learning student experience by creating a feeling of belonging](#)', was highlighted in Advance HE's weekly update at the start of August.

**Liz Hardie** and **Carol Edwards** co-authored article, '[Fostering a sense of belonging through online qualification events](#)', was published in *Distance Education*. This describes an 18-month pilot to develop a greater sense of belonging for our students based on qualification-wide online events and their impact on student engagement and sense of belonging.

## More published articles from Open Justice authors 2024

- **Hardie, Liz** (2024). '[Training is Everything: How to Prepare Students for Policy Clinic Projects](#)'. *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* pp. 72–108.
- **Curryer, Emma** and **Edwards, Carol** (2024). '[The impact of policy work on employability skills in the policy project connected to the criminal appeals clinic at the Open University](#)'. *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* pp. 109–146.
- **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.
- **Curryer, Emma** and **Mawdsley, Gillian** (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*, 31(1), pp. 126–165.
- **Curryer, Emma** and **Edwards, Carol** (2024). '[Innovative ways of developing communities and enhancing students employability skills in the online university environment](#)'. In: Millmore, Amanda ed. *How to Include Employability in the Law School*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 133–146.

# Centre staff and contacts

## Virtual Intern 2024



In 2024 we recruited our third virtual intern Stacy Jane Haigh (working remotely from North Yorkshire) to assist us with the development of a legal podcast and to conduct research on various projects in development.

We recruited Stacy through advertising to undergraduate law and business school students, shortlisting and interviewing them in the usual way.

Stacy is with us until June 2025, during which time we are hoping Stacy 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.

## Associate Lecturers and project support 2023–2024

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.

### A special thank you to:

Arj Arul, Ewan Buckingham, David Byrne (Digital Justice consultant), Hazel Clark, Marcus Crawley (Stakeholder and Alumni Engagement), Emma Curryer, Jamie Daniels, Paul Dale, Sheena Daley, Martyn Fryer, Lizzie Fusco, Bryony Gilbert, Neil Graffin, Mike Green, Gavin Hamilton, Liz Hardie, Mark Hayward, Caroline Ingram, Martin Jones, Katy King, Amy Klosek, Debbie Legge, Avril Martin, Gillian Mawdsley, Andrew Maxfield, Hugh McFaul, Siobhan McCormack, Tamsin Morris, Laura Platts, Julia Preston, Ian Robinson, Kate Ritchie, Cara Sells, Jill St. George, Paul Stookes, Paul Troop, Wannette Van-Eg-Dom-Tuinstra, Chris White, Debbie Wood.



Members of the Open Justice Team 2021–2022 in Milton Keynes, Winter 2022.

Left–Right: Paul Troop, Andrew Maxfield, Kate Ritchie, Dawn Harper, Liz Hardie, Jon–Paul Knight, Francine Ryan, Neil Graffin, Emma Curryer, Martin Jones



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