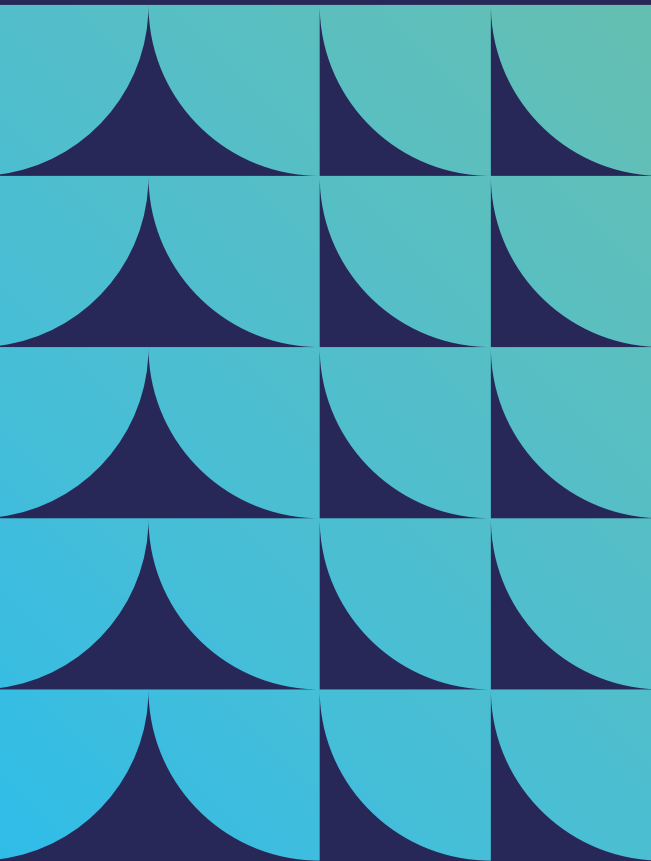


# Open Justice Centre Annual Report 2023



The Open  
University

Law School

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## Stay in touch

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X: [@OU\\_OpenJustice](https://twitter.com/OU_OpenJustice)

# 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 seven 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 pro

bono opportunities 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 2023 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 has played 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.

Centre Director Francine and Centre Manager Jon-Paul were also invited speakers at the Share and Learn: Immersive Technology event (June 23) at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) in Swansea. This was a Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)-funded Quality

Assurance Agency (QAA) Cymru Collaborative Enhancement Project involving all nine universities in Wales.

Open Justice's 'Virtual Courtroom' project was selected to represent the OU in Wales at the event which involved a presentation from each university, an immersive classroom demonstration and a networking lunch with Welsh further and higher education colleagues.

**THE WELSH COLLECTIVE**  
**CYFOETHOGI DYSGU AC**  
**ADDYSGU DIGIDOL**

Recent events have included a presentation of the work of the Open Justice Centre to OU in Wales colleagues.



From left to right, our offices in Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff

# Open Justice Centre activities and 2022–2023 updates



## Open Justice Law Clinic

This year the Open Justice Centre established the Open Justice Business Law Clinic which was a pioneering initiative in collaboration with [Mishcon de Reya](#). The clinic was specifically designed to assist St Giles Trust, which is a charity that works with ex-offenders to empower those individuals with the legal knowledge to support them to successfully create and establish their own business post-release. The project involved the creation of seven Business Law Toolkits that covered entrepreneurship, starting different types of businesses like pop up shops, coffee shops and online businesses.

The students researched and designed their toolkit under the supervision of the lawyers from Mishcon and worked really hard to provide clear accessible guidance on different aspects of business law. These toolkits cover essential topics such as business formation, compliance, contract law, tax and VAT and employment regulations tailored to the needs faced by St Giles Trust's clients stepping into an entrepreneurial world. This project demonstrates the powerful impact of bridging legal expertise and community needs. We were delighted with the positive feedback received from St Giles Trust on the quality of the toolkits.

In addition to our Business Law Clinic, the Open Justice Centre also delivered an extra-curricular project where law students on an employment law project worked in partnership with [Dyslexia London](#) to provide employment law advice and information to support individuals with dyslexia. The students focused on developing a collection of Frequently Asked Questions on employment law which addressed a wide range of issues from discrimination and legal rights.

The project aimed to demystify the law and present complex legal information in a clear and accessible format. The project enhanced our students' understanding of employment law and the importance of ensuring that people have legal awareness of their employment rights in the workplace.



## Open Justice Policy Clinic

In 2019 Open Justice established the Online Policy Clinic to undertake research on behalf of organisations and charities.

The policy clinic is now in its fourth year and continues to grow in terms of the numbers of organisations and students involved in its work each year. Students gain experience of carrying out legal policy and advocacy work for a charitable or third sector organisation or to influence government policy. 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. The students taking part in the policy clinic are in their final year of their law degree.

### 22-23 Policy Clinic Projects

During the academic year 22-23 there were four groups working in the policy clinic on different projects.

## R N I B

Scotland

See differently

One group worked on a project for the [Royal National Institute for the Blind Scotland](#), a charity supporting those who are blind and partially sighted across the UK. Following changes to the law in Scotland relating to the registration process for those who are blind and partially sighted, the project researched how the registration process is working in practice and whether there should be changes to the way in which the registration service works. An abbreviated copy of their report which explains the methodology used for this project can be found [here](#).



Another group worked on a project for the [Scottish Sentencing Council](#), an independent advisory body which carries out a range of work concerning sentencing in Scotland. The students carried out exploratory research into how the mental health of offenders impacts sentencing in Scotland. This project included a number of fieldwork volunteers attending their local Sheriff Courts to provide data on summary sentencing proceedings. An abbreviated copy of the report explaining the research carried out, can be found [here](#).





A third group carried out a project on behalf of the [Bridges Programmes](#), a specialist Scottish agency supporting the social, educational and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants living in Glasgow. The research focused on the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Scotland in order to identify current practice around FGM in Scotland and the current effectiveness of the law in preventing FGM and protecting victims. An abbreviated copy of the report explaining the methods used can be found [here](#).



Finally, a fourth group of students built upon research carried out over the past two years on behalf of the [Environmental Law Foundation](#) (ELF), a charity which helps the voice of ordinary people and communities to be heard on matters affecting the environment in which they live. This project focused on whether local authorities will be on track to meet their own 2030 net-zero targets and an abbreviated report can be found [here](#).

### Continued influence of previous years' projects

A number of projects from previous years have influenced law reform in the last twelve months, and we are delighted that our students' work has impacted proposed changes to the law.

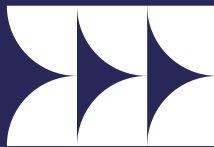


In 20-21 a group of students undertook a project researching the cost of civil weddings, and their report was forwarded to the Law Commission's project 'Weddings'. In July 2022 the Law Commission proposed [reforms to the law](#) relating to where and how couples can get married, to provide simpler, more affordable and personalised weddings. This addressed some of the recommendations in the policy clinic report regarding unjustified differences in costs of civil registry office weddings across the country. You can read the report [here](#).



In 21-22 a policy clinic project, run jointly with Northumbria University, proposed reforms to the law on renting property to tenants with pets. This research was carried out on behalf of the [Society for Companion Animal Studies](#) (SCAS). The [Renters Reform Bill 2023](#) was introduced into Parliament in May 2023, which will make it easier for tenants to keep pets. Tenants will have the right to request a pet and pet insurance will be permitted (which was one of the recommendations of the report).

Finally in 21-22 one of the policy clinic projects (again run jointly with Northumbria University) researched the impact of COVID-19 and the move to online court hearings on the public's access to court hearing. The government announced an open consultation '[Open Justice: the Way Forward](#)' in May 2023, and the analysis and recommendations from the policy clinic report will be used to respond to the consultation.



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

**Policy clinic | Open Justice**



## Criminal Law Clinic

The Open Justice Centre runs an in-house Criminal Justice Clinic where 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. 52 students took part in the year 2022 to 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.



Supervising solicitor and manager of the Criminal justice clinic Emma Curryer writes about the project in this [article](#).



**In terms of practical legal skills, The Criminal Justice Clinic was the most valuable portion of my law degree. When it came to writing my final assessment, I found my experience in the clinic had developed my understanding of the module themes far beyond what reading alone would have done. Although the clinic requires dedication and is very time intensive, I have made friends for life and had a wealth of skills to discuss in a recent interview. I truly credit the clinic experience for the resulting job offer.**

**A wonderful experience for students hungry for real-life work experience. Hard work but worth it for those who want it.**

**Well there it is – just finished my degree !!! I just wanted to say thank you for all your help, support, and guidance through our Justice project. And probably most of all thanks for pushing ahead with the idea to do it all in the first place. It has been a fascinating and inspirational few months.**

Student comments on their journey with the CJC



**You can read some blogs from students that have worked on the 2021-2022 Criminal Justice Clinic project at**  
**[open.ac.uk/open-justice/blog/journey-unknown](https://open.ac.uk/open-justice/blog/journey-unknown)**  
**[open.ac.uk/open-justice/blog/criminal-justice-clinic-opportunity-not-be-missed](https://open.ac.uk/open-justice/blog/criminal-justice-clinic-opportunity-not-be-missed)**





## 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 human rights law and / or international 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.



**Paul Troop**  
Project lead

## 22-23 International law projects

In 22-23 the students focused on the current situation in Ukraine and international humanitarian law, looking in particular at the deportation and transfer of protected persons. Examples of two reports are available to view below.

### [Group 1 Report](#)

This report highlights the forcible transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children by Russia to ascertain State Practice. Focussing on what the international community are saying about the 're-education' centres, fast-tracked adoptions, and the potential re-nationalising of Ukrainian children by Russian forces and their agents.

### [Group 3 Report](#)

This report sets out allegations of the deportation and transfer of protected persons from areas occupied by the Russian Federation, in breach of international humanitarian law, during the course of the current armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

## Mediation

Our e-Mediation project transfers traditional mediation training to an online environment. Students undergo training in online mediation skills including online training sessions, group work and individual work. They then have the opportunity to put these skills into practice by acting as co-mediators in two training-simulated mediations.



Our two trained mediators wrote and delivered three online training sessions and provided additional work for the students to complete between sessions, both individually and in small groups. This included the theory of mediation, introductions to different mediation techniques, consideration of the differences in face-to-face and online mediation and the various skills needed to successfully complete a mediation.

### 22-23 Mediation Projects

On the 22-23 project our students undertook a variety of role play exercises, ending with a simulated online employment law mediation where other students and alumni played the roles of a disgruntled employee and a HR adviser. Feedback from the clients praised the active listening skills of the mediators and their ability manage conflict – for example: ‘the mediators ensured each person had time to listen and speak’ and ‘[the mediators] showing respect to each other [...] set the tone for the meeting and how it should be conducted.’

As part of the project the students drafted an information leaflet introducing their mediation services to potential clients. Below are two examples of these leaflets.

[‘Mediato’ Mediation](#)  
[Mediation 360](#)

## Digital Justice and technology

The Open Justice Centre strives to give students the opportunity to consider how technology can be used to support the public understanding of law. Students design and build apps and chatbots that provide legal information on a specified legal topic. The project does not require students to have specific technology skills such as coding, but students must be willing to learn technical and project management skills and have an interest in legal design.

Students learn how to develop a legal chatbot using a platform developed by Josef. 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 in particular explore the importance of human centred design.



Here, some of our 2023 project students talk about their experiences of the project and you can see examples of the chatbots they created.



## Natalie Robson

'I work in the tech industry and was really interested in the project for that reason. Finding a role where I can combine my law degree and my experience in tech is my ultimate goal. I enjoyed breaking down the law into bite sized pieces that work as a flowchart, it was really insightful and gave me a different perspective of using legislation for this purpose. The project was a great experience - it was a combination of challenging and fun.'

Natalie's Chatbot: [The Legal Glovebox](#)



## Trevor Fletcher

'I learnt in the project that the immediate future of the legal landscape will not be static, with LawTech having significant impact in terms of access to justice. I also learnt that LawTech services has the important potential and capability of providing better certainty, clarity and predictability on legal issues, a much-needed requirement where there is so much noise. Engaging in the project, I developed technical skills on how to develop a chatbot and experienced the behind-the-scenes workings of this system. What I enjoyed most was seeing my bot slowly come alive, a working tool to solve a problem. That was pretty cool. I also enjoyed experiencing how each bot contribution was unique, and the different approaches used to solve different problems.'

Trevor's chatbot: [Redeeming Ground Rent](#)



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

## Street Law

Street Law provides opportunities for OU law students and academics to engage with their communities through providing public legal education opportunities in schools and community groups. In 2023 we were involved in two Street Law projects.



### St Giles Trust SOS+

In the first project we teamed up with [St Giles Trust's SOS+](#) project which delivers preventative and early intervention work to children and young people; as well as training for parents and professionals in educational and community settings.

The project included three tasks and involved updating and producing resources for SOS+ to use when delivering sessions on Joint Enterprise/ Conspiracy, Child Sexual Exploitation and Stop and Search.

Student Amy Klosek wrote in her [blog](#) about the project that her group "were tasked with researching the client, and the law to produce a flyer from scratch to be used to educate secondary school children and their parents about their rights and police powers. We did this by consolidating the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 into something age appropriate and neurodiverse. It's something that I am so proud to have been part of". You can view the flyer [here](#).

Another group produced a presentation on Joint Enterprise which can be viewed [here](#).



## Migrant rights with Atlantic Technological University

Our second Street Law project aimed to raise awareness in relation to migrant rights and was delivered to 150 secondary school pupils in Ireland in collaboration with [ATU \(Atlantic Technological University\)](#).

Amy Klosek on behalf of OU/ Open Justice delivered an online session entitled "Should I stay, or Should I go (or go to Rwanda)? which involved using Gary Lineker's tweet and Match Of The Day theme tune to introduce and debate the Illegal Migration Bill.

This led to a student debate and mini mock trial which was overseen by members of the local intercultural platform. The photos included here show how engaged the pupils were in the workshop which involved music, art, debate and a mini mock trial.

The following comment from Paul Kernan CEO of Donegal Intercultural Platform sums up the value of this street law workshop:

*'The Street Law project makes a valuable contribution to challenges and responses to the greater inclusion of migrants and an understanding of the opportunities afforded by a more diverse population'.*

The two-hour session, which was delivered three times over several days, received excellent feedback from the pupils and teachers with expressions such as "understanding", "empathy" and "interesting" used to describe how the 16-year-old pupils felt about participating in the street law workshop. When asked to note one word which summed up their feelings on asylum seekers and refugees, the word "people" was the most common one used by the pupils at the end of the session. That sums up the essence of the street law workshop.

# Open Justice partnerships

## Developing student professionalism

Providing opportunities to participate in pro bono activities is a means by which we assimilate our students into professional legal culture. For this reason, we have prioritised the development of a professional partnership relationship with our students. The execution of each project relies on students taking ownership of their project, in close collaboration with their tutors and the core team. We provide a set of clear aims in project handbooks which outline professional standards, training, safeguarding and levels of supervision and support expected. This includes fostering online skills to support the development of a culture of collaboration amongst dispersed teams.



## Engaging national and local partners

We have ongoing relationship with these national and local partners, but we have many more relationships with partners who support our policy and international law projects.

### St Giles

Turning a past into a future

#### St Giles

We have developed a strong partnership with St Giles Trust, a national charity with award-winning prison and ex-offender projects, to develop OU student-led prison-based projects.

We were really excited to start a new project in 2023 collaborating with St Giles SOS+ service on developing a new Street Law offering.



#### Support Through Court

Support Through Court (STC) provides support for litigants in person, who are attending court without legal representation, helping them to navigate our complex civil and family legal systems. We are now in our fifth year of this partnership and current collaborations include the virtual courtroom project.

We hope to continue with more collaborative projects in 2024.



### **Citizens Advice**

Our students are continuing to volunteer with Citizens Advice (CA) and can use their experience towards the assessments in the W360 'Justice in Action' module. We continue to liaise with them via the Employer Engagement team at The Open University promoting recruitment drives and events.



Government  
Legal Profession

### **Mentoring scheme – UK Government Legal Profession**

2022-2023 saw the sixth 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 Profession which provides practising Government lawyers to mentor 10 competitively selected students over nine months. Sustained contact with UK Civil Service lawyers is an invaluable tool in raising our students' career aspirations.

#### **Criminal Defence Milton Keynes**

*Criminal & Prison Law*

### **Criminal Defence Milton Keynes**

CDMK solicitors are specialist criminal solicitors with social justice at their core, often representing the most vulnerable in our society. CDMK provide us with cases where a convicted person continues to protest their innocence. Our students then work on these cases in a case management system, reviewing the evidence and researching the law to provide a legal advice and research document to the solicitors' firm. This benefits our students greatly equipping them with valuable employability skills, it also benefits CDMK as they have assistance at looking at pro bono work and it benefits the client as the students thoroughly research the case and no stone is left unturned.

**HICKMAN&ROSE**  
SOLICITORS

### **Hickman & Rose**

Hickman and Rose are a legal firm based in London who have been working with us on briefs for our international law project.



# UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

## United Nations

The Open Justice Centre and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are continuing their partnership to support the Global Resources for Anti-Corruption Education (GRACE) initiative. GRACE has been developed to prevent crime and promote lawfulness – by supplying integrity and ethics education resources for schools, colleges and universities around the world.

Open Justice co-produced a certified five-hour online train-the-trainer course with UNODC, launched in November 2019, and translated into Spanish in 2020.

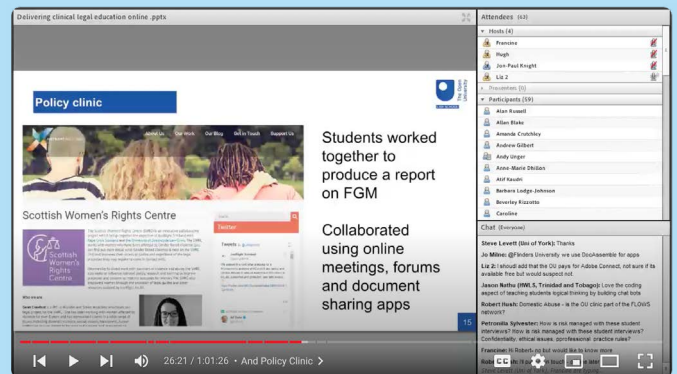
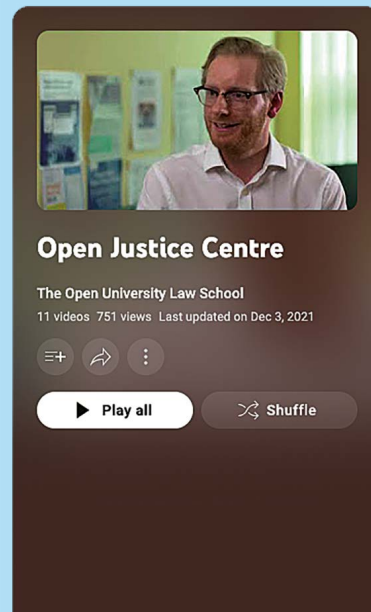
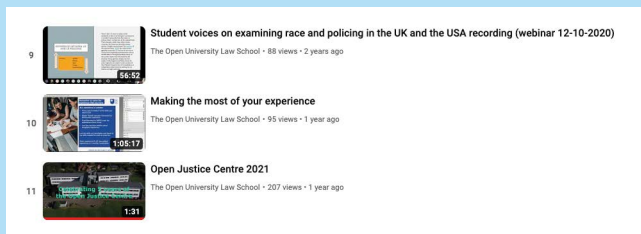
Former Open Justice Co-Director Hugh McFaul was appointed to a nine-month consultancy with UNODC to develop their Global Resources for Anti-Corruption Education Project. His work included engaging with universities in Pakistan, Tunisia and he was an invited speaker at the UNODC Academic Symposium in Egypt in December 2021 and a South Africa in 2022.



# Learning and education activities and outputs

## Video and YouTube resources

The Centre is continuing to expand its presence on the Law School's YouTube channel and have a dedicated playlist. Titled '[Open Justice Centre](#)', it features videos about our student projects, messages from the centre directors, promotional films and a recording of our 'Taking clinical legal education online' webinar.





# W360: Justice in Action 2022–2023



W360: Justice in Action provides Open Justice students with an opportunity to gain academic credit for participating in public-facing pro bono legal projects. Since 2017 we have supported approximately 1,494 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 pro bono work.



**“The Open Justice centre really is a fantastic part of the law degree at the OU and I recommend any law student to get involved when they can”.**

**It was brilliantly supported by the supervising tutors who were all infectiously enthusiastic, the group of fellow students were equally committed and a pleasure to work with.**

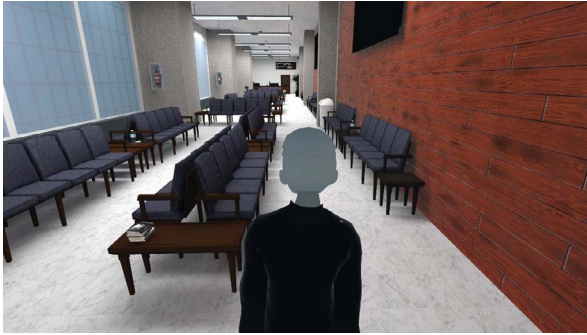
**It was without doubt the highlight of the entire degree”.**

**Dan Mander**  
2021 Open Justice Student



Students have a choice of eight Open Justice Projects including our Open Justice Law Clinics that provide business, family, employment and criminal law advice and support, in addition we offer an international law project, policy and law reform clinics, mediation and Open Justice Legal Tech, where our students develop legal chatbots.

# Virtual courtroom



In 2021 the Open Justice Centre started a project to develop a virtual courtroom (VCR). The aim is to create an immersive virtual environment that gives users a realistic experience of a modern courtroom within which they can interact with each other, explore a typical court environment and undertake courtroom advocacy (mooting).

Developed initially with our students primarily in mind, it quickly became clear that there are several 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 as well as visit a 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 2022 and 2023 has focussed on building the platform, creating additional spaces in the courtroom, testing with different user groups and presenting our findings at internal workshops, external events and international legal conferences.

In 2023 we secured £25K from the Higher Education Innovation Find (HEIF), administered by the OU's central Research, Enterprise and Scholarship (RES) team, to further develop the VCR. The funding will assist with more testing and ongoing development, as well as the creation of promotional materials for interested partners and future funders.



We also 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 will explore the use of the virtual courtroom in teaching and learning.

The project, led by Open Justice Centre Director Francine Ryan, brings together students from each of these areas to practise courtroom presentation skills through an interdisciplinary simulated court hearing.

It is a clear indication that the wider University believes there is great potential in the development of the technology and its various applications.

Our recent [promotional video](#) gives further details and demonstrates the courtroom in action.

## ReImagineLAW

Francine Ryan was a guest on the [Re Imagine Law](#) podcast talking about the 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.



### **Free course regarding search and rescue of refugees at sea**

A new free course on OpenLearn is looking at the law and issues of wellbeing regarding the search and rescue of people who make dangerous crossings at sea.

The '[Search and rescue of refugees at sea](#)' course is an introduction to international laws that govern maritime search and rescue (or SAR). It also seeks to examine issues of wellbeing which might arise from working with traumatised people and is designed for those who have an interest in the law of the sea or may find themselves working on SAR operations.

Senior Lecturer in Law Neil Graffin, together with PhD graduate Jo Vincett (now at Liverpool John Moores University) and former Law School colleague Matt Howard (now at University of Kent, Kent Law School) have created the course, with joint funding from the Open Justice Centre and [The British Academy](#).

# 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.

Between 1 October 2022 and 30 September 2023 there were 8,369 unique visitors to the website. Including return visits, the total rises to 11,859.

Some 70.3% of users typed our address directly or bookmarked us to find us, 25.7% used a search engine, 3.1% came from social networks and just under 1.9% accessed us through other websites.

## Top 12 most popular pages 2022–2023

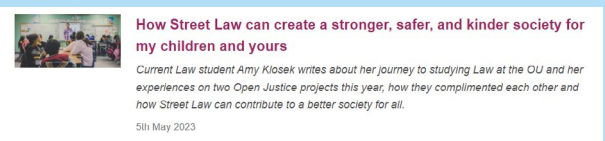
Website page	Visits
Open Justice   Main landing page	2,321
Blog	1,735
Get legal advice	747
An introduction to UK immigration law and becoming an immigration advisor	588
Meet the open justice team	450
Careers	413
Public understanding of law	288
Opportunities for social justice progression in law	273
Meet the tutors	241
Open Justice Week 2023	222
Does an open university degree really compete in the employment market? (Blog article)	205
Christmas reflections	192

## 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.



We published 38 blog pieces from July 2021 to October 2022. Above is a screen shot of a recent post.

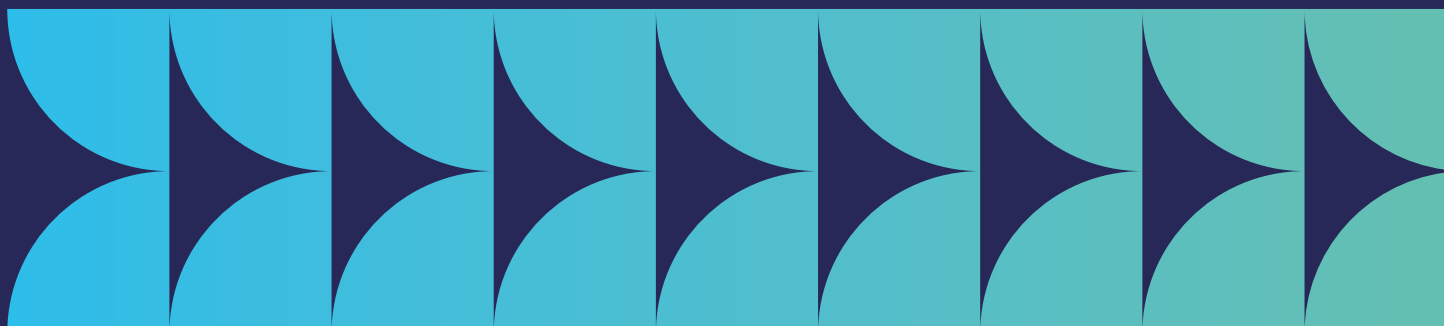
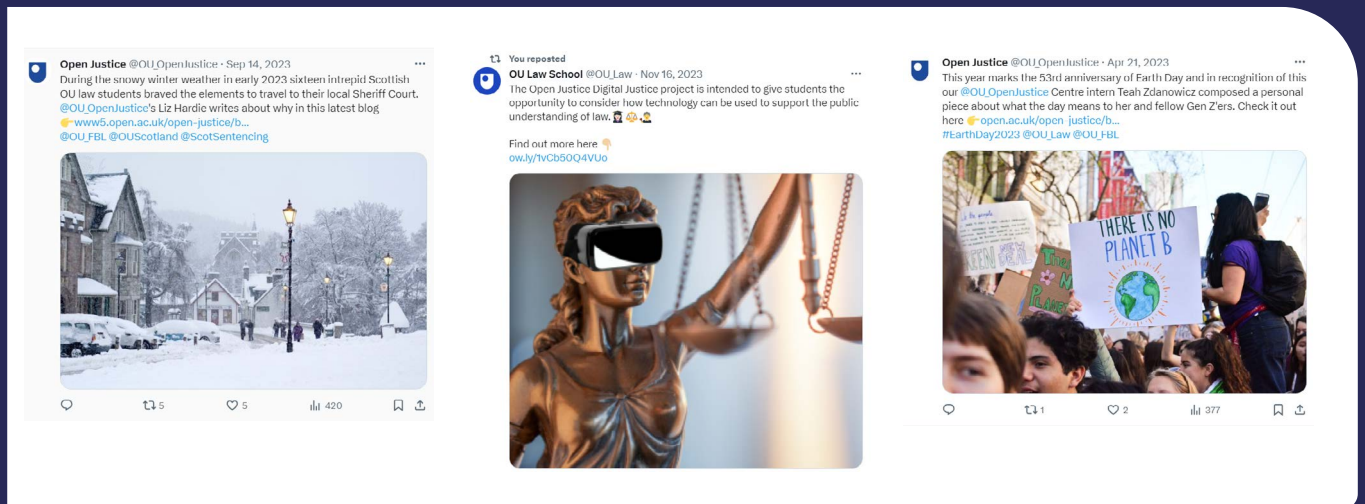
## Twitter (X) account report

Between June 2022 and August 2023, we gained 79 new followers, taking us to 1,647 followers. We are pleased with this progress but are keen to spread news of our projects and student successes so please follow us at @OU\_OpenJustice if you have not already done so. Twitter (X) activity has slowed down noticeably over the last twelve months and so future plans for a LinkedIn account and other social media accounts are being discussed.

Our student blogs and the annual 'advent calendar' blog series in December provided us with some popular tweets as well as Open Justice Week.

This year we continued to concentrate our efforts on promoting our events, student activities, webinars, news coverage and blog posts.

Blogs about the Scottish Sheriff Court project, the 53rd anniversary of Earth Day and OU Digital Justice projects proved popular.



## Open Justice Week 2023



In 2023 we celebrated our sixth annual e-festival of public legal education, [Open Justice Week 2023](#). Every June since 2018, the Centre has presented examples of legal education activities produced by students studying the W360: 'Justice in Action' module, as well as other law students who volunteer for the projects on an extra-curricular basis.

In addition to six student blogs reflecting on their experiences this year, there were examples and updates from four current projects – The Policy Clinic, International Law, Mediation and Street Law.

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."

### It's Legally Christmas



Our 'Legally Christmas' blog series has established itself as a much-anticipated seasonal tradition in recent years.

One legal blog gets posted every day in the run-up to the university shutdown on a range of legal topics, all with a festive sprinkle. Previous years have seen a murder mystery mini-series, legal letters to Santa and even cold water swimming confessions.

This year, Head of Law School Hugh McFaul's opening blog showcased some of the highlights from the last 12 months followed by blogs about Agatha Christie, 12 days of legal cases, mediation and alcohol poisoning!

# Award shortlists and nominations in 2022–2023

Our 'Criminal Justice Clinic' was shortlisted in the [LawWorks and Attorney General Student Awards 2023](#). These awards recognise and celebrate the outstanding pro bono work undertaken by law schools and law students across the UK.

Our shortlisted project in the 'Best New Pro Bono Activity' category involves students researching and advising on live criminal cases under the direct supervision of a solicitor (further details available in a [recent blog](#) from one of the student participants, Amy Klosek).

LawWorks Chair Alasdair Douglas hosted the awards ceremony at the Terrace Pavilion on Thursday 27 April. Award winners received their prizes from Lord Stewart of Dirleton KC, Advocate General for Scotland.

Open Justice Centre Manager Jon-Paul Knight said: "Although we didn't win we were very proud to be shortlisted and we had a great day meeting the other nominees and visiting both the House of Commons and the House of Lords."



*Jon-Paul is shown with, right to left: student Amy Klosek, Emma Curryer (one of the Law School's heads of department) and two ALs – Gillian Mawdsley and Cara Sells.*

## Open Justice Student Awards 2023



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. This year we renamed our individual winner award the 'Iain Service Outstanding Individual Contribution' award in tribute to Iain Service, former 'Justice in action' student and law school alumni who worked with us on the administration and delivery of the Criminal Justice Clinic. Iain acted as the 'big brother' to groups of students, supporting them using the online case management system and contributing to the training and weekly supervision sessions.

Iain passed away in 2023 and will be much missed by the Open Justice Team and everyone who worked with him.

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

This year Kara Tobin was the winner of the 'Iain Service Outstanding Individual Contribution' award, with Olivia Ferguson as runner-up.



### Kara Tobin – Individual winner

Kara took part in the Open Justice Law Clinic where students give free legal advice to members of the public under the supervision of qualified solicitors. Students are allocated to a firm of students and work on cases in teams, building and maintaining valuable working relationships with their colleagues. Students working in the clinic are subject to the same standards and professional obligations required of all solicitors so hard work and effort is required to succeed.

Tutor Arj Arul who nominated Kara for the award said:

*"Kara had significant health issues during the module year yet consistently approached her studies with courage and determination. She displayed all the qualities of a great team player, supporting colleagues and getting stuck into the project. She embraced technology and self-development and exemplified professionalism in all her dealings with colleagues and clients alike".*

#### Arj Arul

Tutor

On winning the award, Kara said:

*"I had an amazing time studying the module, met some amazing teammates and it was such a pleasure to work with them. I was stunned but absolutely delighted about the award and it felt really good to work alongside Lauren, Lauren, Tara and Edda which has boosted my confidence so much. I'm very, very grateful and it feels like I've been part of a module wide (and OU-wide) team in getting my degree. I'm about to start the Bar Course on Monday and that's terrifying and exciting all at once but I know I've got that extra spring in my step now thanks to my experiences at the OU."*

**Kara Tobin**





### **Olivia Ferguson – Individual winner runner up**

Olivia took part in the Mediation project which gives students the chance to undertake training in civil and community mediation. They have the opportunity to understand how mediation skills, typically used in a face-to-face context, can be adapted to enable mediation in an online context. At the end of the project students apply the skills they have developed as a mediator in a mock online mediation. The project provides students with valuable negotiation skills which can be applied in many aspects of life. Olivia was nominated by her tutor Hazel Clark who said:

*“Olivia was in a group of 3 for the mediation project and displayed a maturity well beyond her years in being a supportive team member to her colleagues. Her colleagues both experienced quite challenging family and health circumstances (one of them had a baby in the course of the presentation, for instance). Olivia managed moving to Cyprus in the course of the year. When the simulated mediation came round, as they were a team of three, one of the students had to do the mediation twice (which involved spending two long evenings mediating online). Olivia volunteered to take this on, because the colleague who had been nominated to do it was unable to do so. She did this without fuss notwithstanding the fact it increased her workload”.*

#### **Hazel Clark**

Tutor

Olivia praised the experience saying:

*“It was such an incredible delight and a real highlight of my studies so far to participate in this module, let alone to go on to be recognised as a Open Justice Runner Up for outstanding contribution. Throughout this entire project my tutors, and team were supportive, enthusiastic and made learning a real joy. For myself alone, this module really aided in transforming my own personal perception of what it takes to be a legal profession in modern society and led me to once again believe I have what it takes. Thank you to all of the Open University Tutors, teachers and alumni for making higher education possible for all.”*

#### **Olivia Ferguson**

## Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice

The 'Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice' saw a group of four win in this year's awards for their work on the mediation project.

**Jennie Ames, Oana Kloos, Alexandra Denham, Sophie Perks – team winners**

Tutor Hazel Clark who supervised their work said:

*"I have nominated a group - they really were outstanding. They were supportive of one another, met weekly throughout the project and were hardworking and motivated - a complete pleasure to deal with. It was interesting to see how they dealt with a contentious issue which arose in the context of the simulated mediation - that of Covid vaccination status. One of the group had not been vaccinated as a matter of principle and another was clinically vulnerable and was particularly pro vaccine. They dealt with this difference brilliantly by seeking to understand each other's perspectives and then simply accepting them. They were the only group in the last two years we have been using Teams, who developed a system of screen-sharing a whiteboard too, which enhanced their mediation practice. I really hope that their collegiality could be recognised".*

**Hazel Clark**

Tutor



Group member Oana Kloos said:

*"'Justice in action' (W360) has offered me an amazing opportunity that I will forever be very grateful for. It would have not been possible without the guidance and understanding of the best tutor anyone could ever wish for, Hazel, and the support, dedication, and encouragements from the most loving and caring team I have ever had the pleasure to work with. Winning this award was a most welcome bonus for which I am extremely thankful and participating in this project was such an eye opener for me, a beautiful experience, a boost of self-confidence as well as feeling as a part of a small but tight knitted family. The knowledge and skills I have gained while studying for the Open Justice project have laid the foundation for my path towards becoming the best version of myself."*

**Kara Tobin**



There were two runners up groups this year, one for the Open Justice Clinic and the other for the Criminal Justice Clinic group.

**Team runners up (Open Justice Clinic): Edda Vallen, Lauren Urry, Tara Carter, Kara Tobin, Lauren Betsworth**

Tutor Arj Arul who supervised their work said:

*"This team went above and beyond to support each other and their clients. They maintained professionalism and were highly motivated and well-coordinated. This was despite many events along the way including a twin pregnancy! The team displayed great resilience in ensuring the job was done at every moment".*

**Arj Arul**

Tutor



Group member Tara Carter said:

*"Being a part of the Open Justice Clinic was an amazing and, at first, a daunting experience. Being placed with a team of strangers and having to work on projects involving legal topics I knew little about was a steep learning curve. However, I had the good fortune to be assigned to a fantastic team. We had an excellent tutor and solicitors involved who supported us as we processed the two very different cases on which we had to provide legal advice. I was heavily pregnant with twins when I began the project. They had arrived by the second case, and my teammates had dubbed them the "Clio twins" to honour the system we had been adhering to throughout. When it was announced that I had won an award for my participation in the Open Justice Clinic, I was ecstatic and pleasantly surprised to have been nominated.*

*Being a member of the Open Justice Clinic and working with such an amazing group of people was an honour. I would heartily recommend the clinic to all legal students as an excellent component of the OU law degree. I am thankful for both the skills and the memories I now have."*

**Tara Carter**

**Team runners up (Criminal Justice Clinic): Stephanie Basset, Sarah Dillon, Dawn Gale, Charles Gillan, Christopher Macklin, Emma Wiberg.**

Tutor Avril Martin who supervised their work said:

*"This group called themselves Beeline to Justice and worked cohesively together at all times. Of particular note was how understanding and supportive they were of each other when some faced tough times. I also understand that they were supportive and gave helpful kind advice to other teams who were facing struggles on how to work more effectively together. This team were a pleasure as they were efficient, hardworking, and enjoyed sharing tasks and developing as a team".*

**Avril Martin**

Tutor

# Lectures, conferences, workshops and events

Open Justice academics have contributed to a range of online and face to face national and international public engagement events this year.

## MARCH 2023

Justice and Innovation Group  
(Network for Justice) (online)



Francine Ryan and Jon-Paul Knight presented to the Justice and Innovation Group of [Network for Justice](#) on Thursday 9 March. Network for Justice brings together the justice community to share knowledge and expertise to support the delivery of access to justice.



## MAY 2023

VR Technology and Open University  
Teaching workshop, Milton Keynes, UK

Open Justice Centre gave a presentation at the 'VR Technology and Open University Teaching' workshop on campus in Milton Keynes and online.

Francine Ryan and Jon-Paul Knight were at the one-day workshop on Tuesday 9 May which was facilitated by Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FASS) colleagues. Lecturers from across the OU who are engaged with augmented reality (AR) / virtual reality (VR) technology, as well as external speakers who have worked in this field, came together to survey the current range of uses of VR technology across the University and create lasting connections.

Francine and Jon-Paul gave a presentation about the VR app produced for the W360: 'Justice in action' module, as well as discussing their current 'virtual courtroom' project.

OU colleagues from Learner and Discovery Services (LDS), together with those in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and FASS, presented with speakers from Leeds and Salford universities. A representative from, the AR platform and creative studio, also demonstrated their new features and headsets.





**APRIL 2023**

### **Association of Law Teachers University of Westminster, London, UK**

Emma Curryer presented 'Designing and delivering vicarious trauma training to students in the law curriculum. Where are we now?' at the Association of Law Teachers (ALT) Conference on 17-18 April, hosted by Westminster University. This was as a follow-up to her paper presented the previous year. Emma showcased the provisional findings of her ongoing scholarship work and argued that it is everyone's responsibility to be alert to, and make others aware of, the risk of vicarious trauma in the legal profession.



Siobhan Cullen also presented a paper on 'Raising Awareness of Migrant Rights: a Street Law programme to impact all Educational Sectors' in collaboration with colleague Brónagh Heverin from ATU Donegal.

**JUNE 2023**

### **Student Gray's Inn visit, London, UK**

Level 3 Law students attended the Mixed Messes evening event at Gray's Inn in London in June 2023.



These events provide opportunities for one-to-one engagement or in small groups of four (a 'mess') with barristers and judicial members of the Inn at a drinks reception and dinner. This was preceded by Her Honour Judge Wendy Joseph KC's talk on 'The rewards of a life in crime', with the students also enjoying a tour of the Inn and its grounds.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the students described it as 'a real opportunity to network and glean information in a meaningful way'. They found the conversations with barristers and other industry professionals enlightening and inspirational, and it is hoped to continue offering this opportunity to more law students in the future.



## JUNE 2023

### LawWorks Conference, London, UK

Francine Ryan was an invited panellist to explore the power of technology and technology’s place in access to justice at the LawWorks Conference. Francine was joined on the panel by Henry Sturm (Head of Digital Programmes at LawWorks), Deborah Smith (Executive Director / Senior Counsel of Digital Assets Legal at Goldman Sachs, and member of the board of trustees for LawWorks) and Thomas Lowe (Head of Policy at the Digital Poverty Alliance).

## JUNE 2023

### Committee of Heads of University Law Schools (CHULS)



# CHULS



Liz Hardie and Francine Ryan delivered a presentation, ‘ChatGPT: teaching tool or cheating tool? Incorporating Generative AI into legal teaching’, to the [Committee of Heads of University Law Schools \(CHULS\)](#).

## SEPTEMBER 2023

### Leicester Law School’s Education Away Day, University of Leicester



Liz Hardie and Francine Ryan were guest speakers at Leicester Law School’s Education Away Day on Friday 22 September. They gave an interactive presentation on artificial intelligence (AI) in legal education to support law school colleagues in their response to the impact of generative AI on teaching and learning.

## SEPTEMBER 2023

### The Mysterious Mrs Christie: Evidence, Elusion, Afterlives, University of Exeter and Exeter Library



Emma Curryer presented a paper entitled ‘Agatha Christie: author, archaeologist and criminal mastermind, an enigma’ at the seventh international Agatha Christie conference.

## OCTOBER 2023

### UCLan Cyprus Teaching and Learning Seminar Series



Liz Hardie and Francine Ryan presented at the Teaching and Learning Seminar Series at UCLan (University of Central Lancashire) Cyprus in October 2023 regarding the emergence of ChatGPT and its implications. The purpose of the seminar series is to provide UCLan Cyprus colleagues with opportunities to improve their teaching skills, explore innovative methods of teaching, and ultimately enrich the learning experience of their students.

# Research outputs

The Centre is also committed to producing high quality research.

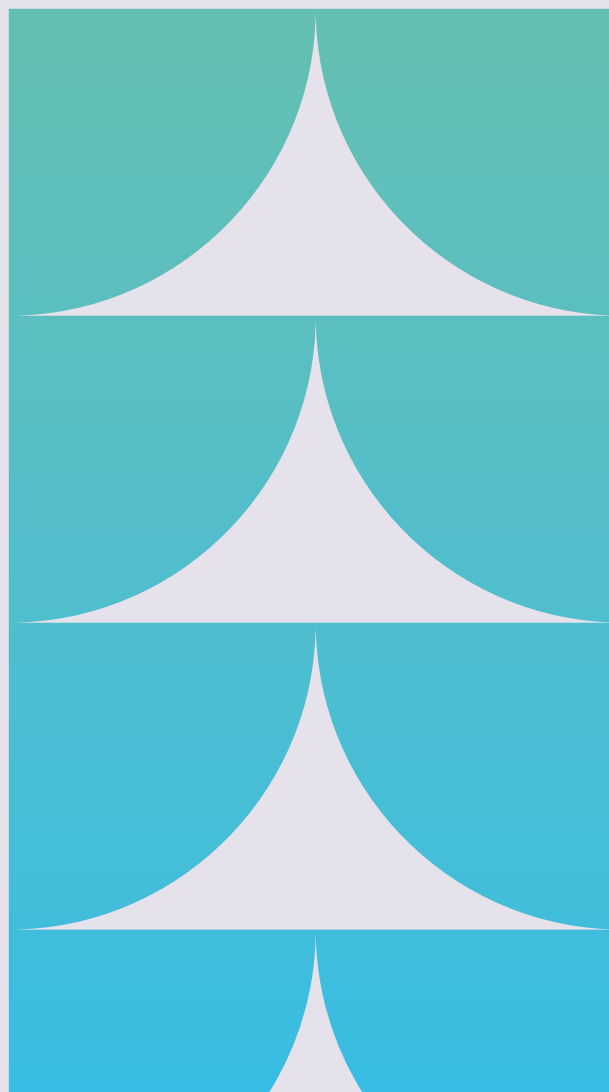
Some highlights are given below, and a full list of published articles (including student research) is available on our website's [research page](#).



The Open Justice Centre is delighted to have been invited to participate in a nationwide project, [Mapping the Arts and Humanities](#), to map the UK's diverse arts and humanities research infrastructure. This will also highlight the connections between the organisations, institutions and networks that provide such key support for the arts and humanities.

An online interactive map will allow users to find and connect with research activity more easily, and boost visibility for research centres and networks across the country. The Open Justice Centre is being included in the map which launched in November 2023.

Based in the School of Advanced Study at the University of London, the project was commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Research England.



## Sudden Deaths and Fatal Accident Inquiries in Scotland

Gillian Mawdsley is an Associate Lecturer who teaches on a number of Law modules, as well as supporting the Open Justice Criminal Law Clinic. She is a qualified Scottish solicitor with a background spanning the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

Gillian has just published [Sudden Deaths and Fatal Accident Inquiries in Scotland: Law, Policy and Practice](#) via Bloomsbury.

Although focused on the Scottish system of reporting of deaths and subsequent investigation, the book compares and contrasts with England and Wales, as well as having an international perspective.



## Recent publications by Open Justice Centre authors

- Ajevski, Marjan; Barker, Kim; Gilbert, Andrew; Hardie, Liz and Ryan, Francine (2023). [ChatGPT and the Future of Legal Education and Practice. The Law Teacher \(Early Access\)](#).
- Jones, Emma; Ryan, Francine; McFaul, Hugh; Vince, David; Kizilkaya, Lawrence and Daniels, Jamie (2023). [Using virtual reality to enhance the law school curriculum](#). In: Tharanj, Ann and Gledhill, Kris eds. Teaching Legal Education in the Digital Age: Pedagogical Practices to Digitally Empower Law Graduates. Routledge.
- Madhloom, Omar and McFaul, Hugh eds. (2022). [Thinking About Clinical Legal Education: Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives](#). Emerging Legal Education. Routledge.
- Jones, Emma; Ryan, Francine; Thanaraj, Ann and Wong, Terry (2022). [Digital Lawyering: Technology and Legal Practice in the 21st Century](#). Abingdon: Routledge.



# Centre contact details

## Virtual Intern 2023



In 2023 we recruited our second virtual intern Teah Zdanowicz (working remotely from Scotland) to assist us with the development of a website and to conduct research to assist with our virtual courtroom project.

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

Teah gained new skills and knowledge in website production using the Word Press platform 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. Teah worked with us as part of the project team for six months.

As well as producing a website ( you can read more about Teah's internship experiences [here](#)) Teah also provided the Open Justice blog with some fantastic think pieces that you can check out [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). You can find more from Teah at the website [blog page](#).

## Associate Lecturers and project support 2022–2023

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..

### Thank you to:

Arj Arul, Astrid Alvarez (Stakeholder and Alumni Engagement), Ewan Buckingham, David Byrne (Digital Justice consultant), Hazel Clark, Marcus Crawley (Stakeholder and Alumni Engagement), Siobhan Cullen, Emma Curryer, Jamie Daniels, Paul Dale, Sheena Daley, Lidia Dancu (clinic support), 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, Suzanne Rab, 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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