The Open Justice Centre leverages the expertise of the OU Law School for public benefit. Since 2016 we have experimented with 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 of being open to people, places, methods and ideas.

Over the last five years we have produced many research outputs which demonstrate 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 at a time when the pandemic has forced universities to reassess their teaching and knowledge exchange practices.

We are very pleased to share our 2021 Annual Report which celebrates our fifth anniversary and provides an opportunity to highlight some of our key achievements which are the result of 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.

**OVERVIEW**

Hugh McFaul
Director

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 has included public legal education events in Belfast, school-based workshops in Scotland and prison-based engagements in Wales. This is in addition to our online work on policy issues, legal advice and public legal education which reaches across national boundaries.

Upcoming events include a repeat appearance at the IMAGINE! Festival of Ideas & Politics in Belfast where we will join an exciting range of speakers including Noam Choksy, Bonnie Greer and Claire Fox to support a session delivered by Dr Sophie Doherty on using visual art to explore the concept of justice.

From left to right, our offices in Belfast, Edinburgh and Cardiff
The award-winning Open Justice Law Clinic provides free, professional-standard legal advice to members of the public on a variety of different areas of law. The clinic is the result of a successful collaboration between students, Associate Lecturers, supervising solicitors and academics which has created a unique online, student-led service.

Since the clinic began in October 2017, we have advised on 166 cases and signposted over 200 cases to other organisations. We have advised mainly on civil law cases: defamation, libel, breach of contract, negligence claims, consumer rights, enforcing debts and small claims, but our family and employment cases are rising.

We have continued our partnership with Lancaster University, Rawtenstall Social Justice Centre and MP, Jake Berry and have been offering virtual appointments to members of the community in Rawtenstall. This year we began a collaboration with the Environmental Law Foundation and have advised on a small number of environmental law cases. We are hoping we will be able to increase the number of cases over the next year. The Environmental Law Foundation receives enquiries on a range of different types of issues including air pollution, nuisance and enforcing climate change legislation.

We are delighted that the clinic is supported by Paul Stookes who is a leading expert on environmental law alongside his role as an OU Law tutor. Paul has advised on a number of high-profile cases as a consultant and advocate at Richard Buxton Solicitors.

I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to undertake pro-bono with the clinic, it truly has shaped my journey to become a lawyer. The work that the Open Justice Law clinic undertakes, both for student experience and access to justice, is truly fantastic and will forever stay in my heart.

Rachel Innes
Open Justice Clinic Law Student
The Open Justice Centre has a long-standing partnership with St Giles Trust, with past collaborations focusing on face-to-face projects where our students provided law seminars for prisoner and ex-prisoner peer advisers trained by St Giles Trust. The peer advisers chose the subjects, which included: family law; sentences of imprisonment for public protection; release on temporary licence; deportation; and legal issues around employment after prison. Students developed resources and seminar activities and gave interactive presentations on the chosen subjects.

With the restrictions on visiting prisons relating to COVID-19, this year we collaborated on a new online extra-curricular project to support the peer advisors in ‘The St Giles Pantry’. Peer advisers supported clients in a number of different ways including providing legal information and support. In this project students worked in small groups in collaboration with peer advisors to produce employment and housing law handouts to support their work with clients. The project focused on distilling complex legal information in a clear and accessible way. The students used images and diagrams to make the law user friendly and provided links to other organisations which could support the peer advisors and their clients. All the interactions between the students and the peer advisors took place virtually. We are very grateful for the support of St Giles in developing student projects. One of our Open Justice winners, Danielle Rees, who worked on this project has been recognised for her many contributions to Open Justice activities.

Our Street Law project offers public understanding of law (PUL) ‘Street Law’ workshops in secondary schools and community groups with the aim of promoting a greater understanding of law and legal issues. Through the interactive workshops, audiences engage on legal issues that are of particular relevance to them through a range of activities. For 2020-2021, due to COVID-19, our face-to-face activities were put on hold.

Instead, this year we tasked our Street Law group with researching ‘what, if anything, should the Open Justice Centre provide in the way of free advice to prospective law students who are struggling to write UCAS statements for university admission?’. Students worked together to produce and collate resources for a pilot project, aimed at providing an information package for schools that we could then look to promote further. The students produced a report and a condensed version with introduction, executive summary and student biographies is available at the link below. The full report is available on request by emailing open-justice@open.ac.uk

Street Law UCAS Project Report
(condensed version)

In this blog the project team reflects on its experiences.
Open Justice Policy Clinic

In the Open Justice Policy Clinic students work in small groups to provide legal and policy consultancy to a charity or organisation under the supervision of legal academics. Following a brief provided by the organisation, they research a specific area of law or issue and produce a report which the organisation can use in its policy and advocacy work.

In 2019-2020 the students worked on briefs provided by two organisations.

The first research project was undertaken as part of the Law Commission’s project ‘Weddings’, which is considering possible reforms to the law regarding how people may get married in England and Wales. Their report compared and analysed the cost of civil weddings across different geographical locations and made recommendations for reform of the law, focused on ensuring less variation in the costs of civil weddings and the need for local authorities to be more transparent about their costs.

The report, ‘Cost of Non-religious wedding Ceremonies’, is available here.

I would highly recommend the policy clinic. From the outset of my studies, my goal has always been to become a criminal lawyer; however, my participation in the clinic provided me with an unexpected but most welcome opportunity to become curious, explore and understand environmental law; focusing particularly on climate change emergency declarations as part of a UK wide research project. I had the opportunity to represent the Open Justice Centre as part of a national meeting with other students across the UK, which was a real privilege. The policy clinic is the hidden gem of W360!

The second research project was undertaken on behalf of the Environmental Law Foundation (ELF), an organisation which provides access to environmental legal advice and action on behalf of individuals and communities and those who may be disadvantaged. Students reviewed and analysed the public information available in the East Midlands and East of England regions relating to climate change and, more specifically, climate emergency declarations (CEDs) made by public authorities since 2019. They found that whilst many councils had made CEDs and were carrying out some progressive and effective work in securing carbon reduction, meaningful action was lacking and express carbon reduction action was sparse. The report recommended that public bodies provide greater transparency and accessibility in relation to climate action, and that such action is done in a more planned, structured and collaborative way.


More information about the Open Justice Policy Clinic’s work can be found on our website: Open Justice Week 2021.
The Freedom Law Clinic (FLC) is a not-for-profit organisation providing pro bono research and advice on appeals for people who have been convicted of very serious criminal offences but who are maintaining their innocence.

Law students from eight UK law schools collaborate using the online platform Slack, to research grounds for criminal appeals. OU students have been appointed as case workers to mentor new students from other higher education institutions and updates for 2020 included new training on vicarious trauma and criminal law as well as the opportunity to hand in a written piece of work and give an oral presentation.

Our students have valued the rare opportunity to engage in pro bono criminal work. Student Liam Chin (pictured left) wrote in a recent blog piece:

“The Freedom Law Clinic (project) completely changed my view on what a lawyer is. It developed my reason for being a lawyer. What was once a desire to complete a task for a university module, has developed into a lifelong ambition to promote access to justice and address social inequality. Moreover, it has promoted the rule of law from a seemingly minor topic, studied in the first year of university, to the forefront of my mind in everything I do.”

More information on the FLC is available here: freedomlawclinic.org

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.

In 2020-2021 we trained 52 students who then successfully mediated two different scenarios, the last one involving other tutors and former students who played the part of clients in an employment law dispute. The clients provided feedback on the students’ work and this was overwhelmingly positive, as students put into practice the skills and techniques they had learnt during the project. The majority of students brought their mediation to a successful conclusion and, in a few cases where the entire dispute was not resolved, the student mediators assisted the clients to reach consensus on most of the key issues.

Conducting mediations online allowed students to simulate the conditions in which many ‘real’ mediations were carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, and also allowed them to develop skills in using a range of online technologies. Students also carried out a small piece of research on the advantages and disadvantages of online mediation. The skills they developed in online communication and conflict resolution will be of wider benefit to them going forward.
Digital Justice and technology

The Digital Justice project is about giving students the space to think about how to solve legal issues through the use of technology. Students are encouraged to think about new ways to design legal services and how technology can be used to support public understanding of law. In this project students get to experiment with legal technology to encourage their curiosity and creativity.

Through the course of the 16-week extra-curricular project 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. The Digital Justice project uses design thinking and explores the importance of human-centred design.

This year, 33 students participated in the project, which culminated in the Digital Justice competition where students pitched their bot to judges Sam Flynn from Josef and Adam Hunter from Clifford Chance.

The winning submission by Elizabeth Hill was a housing repair bot, Rodger the Repairs Bot, aimed at helping tenants to get the help they need. The bot not only provided legal information and guidance, but it also created a letter for the user to send to their landlord.

Bots by finalists James Cheeseman and Peter Bratt were developed to support the work of our Open Justice Law Clinic. Kate Wells' bot provided information and guidance on housing issues.

“By taking part in the project, I gained a better understanding of how technology can be used in the future and how the Josef software makes the creation of bots easy and simple. There will be increasing demand for such technology and it has been an excellent experience that I hope I will get to do again someday. The challenges of freeing up professionals to work on assisting clients by taking away the need to answer simple questions by using this technology will be extremely valuable to firms worldwide.”

James Cheeseman, Digital Justice student
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.

St Giles Trust

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 have run projects with around 100 students serving prisoners in 11 prisons across England and Wales. Projects consist of between three and five half-day visits over a three-month period and have included legal research and guidance projects in collaboration with prison-based peer advisors, and an innovative prison radio project.

During COVID-19 restrictions our students worked in small groups in collaboration with peer advisors to produce employment and housing law handouts to support St Giles’ work with clients in their Pantry food hubs (see more on page 5).

Students taking part in Open Justice projects are encouraged to reflect on their experiences on the Open Justice blog, which provides a public forum to raise the profile of our project in and beyond the University. Blog posts on the Pantry Project and the prison projects illustrate the impact of these opportunities on our students.

Having the opportunity to be a part of this project with the St Giles Trust and Open Justice was exciting and within a short space of time actually opened my eyes to the significance of accessibility to the law and legal information.

Pantry Project student Rachel Plaskett
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 fourth year of this partnership and are delighted that our students are continuing to make a positive contribution to the work of this important charity.

We hope to continue with more collaborative projects over the coming year.

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. COVID-19 has affected the CA Witness Support Service over the last 18 months, but we are hoping that this can resume once it is safe to do so. We continue to liaise with the Employer Engagement team at The Open University and have recently assisted with a recruitment drive for CA where students can volunteer for the organisation but still work from home.

Environmental Law Foundation

In 2020 we developed a partnership with Environmental Law Foundation, a charity which aims to provide free information and guidance on environmental issues for individuals and communities. Our students undertook research on behalf of ELF together with eight other universities and members of UKELA’s [UK Environmental Law Association] Student Working Party to review the impact of local authorities’ climate declarations around the UK. The full report is available at the ELF website. We look forward to working with ELF over the next 12 months.

Mentoring scheme – UK Government Legal Profession

This year (2020-2021) included the fourth 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.
United Nations

The Open Justice Centre and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are continuing their partnership to deliver the Education for Justice (E4J) initiative. E4J 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.

OJ Director Hugh McFaul was appointed to a nine-month consultancy with UNODC to develop its Global Resources for Anti-Corruption Education Project. His work included engaging with universities in Pakistan and Tunisia and he is an invited speaker at the UNODC Academic Symposium in Egypt in December 2021.
Video and YouTube resources

The Centre is continuing to expand its presence on the Law School’s YouTube channel and we now have a dedicated playlist. Titled ‘Open Justice Centre’, it features videos about our student projects, messages from the centre directors and a recording of our ‘Taking clinical legal education online’ webinar.

OU and BBC collaborations

Hugh McFaul and Francine Ryan are Academic Advisors to The Detectives; a BBC2 documentary following Greater Manchester Police as they tackle complex and organised crime. The first two episodes were broadcast in May of this year with the remaining episodes due to be broadcast in 2022. Our involvement in the production of The Detectives has been an excellent opportunity to raise the public profile of the OU Law School and the Open Justice Centre.

Hugh was advisor for the previous series which reached millions of viewers who were invited to explore the legal issues raised in the series on OpenLearn, the OU’s public platform.

The BBC’s new courtroom drama ‘You Don’t Know Me’ is released on 5 December and this has led to an exciting new collaboration between Open Justice and the BBC ideas production team.

Hugh McFaul and Francine Ryan have been involved in a new BBC ideas film that asks the question: does it ever pay to represent yourself in court? The programme explores some of the reasons for and challenges around self-representation particularly in light of the cuts to legal aid. It will be released in December 2021 alongside the BBC drama.
W360: JUSTICE IN ACTION 2020-2021

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 1,000 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.

“...

I had gone back and forth on whether I would study this module or not, as I did not feel confident that I would be good enough to do it. Despite this, I decided to take the risk and just do it. I could not be more glad that I did. Out of every module I have ever studied at The Open University, this was my absolute favourite. I learnt skills which I could easily see the real-world use for. I produced work which I knew would have a tangible effect outside of the university. I developed my reflection skills to a point where I finally understood what I wanted to do next and my original motivations for studying. I would highly recommend the module to anyone who is considering it, as it is the best decision that I have made.

W360 student feedback 2021

For 2021-2022 we have focused on offering online pro bono projects, and introducing new international and criminal law projects. We hope to resume face-to-face projects as soon as possible.
The Open Justice Centre celebrated its fifth Birthday in October 2021 which gives us the opportunity to look back on some of our achievements.

Supporting the social justice mission of The Open University

Widening access to experiential legal education

Approximately 1,076 students have been involved in our community-based projects over the last five years. The popularity of both our undergraduate module W360: Justice in Action and our extra-curricular opportunities continues to grow.

We are award winning

- Attorney General Best Legal Tech Award 2019
- Francine Ryan, Finalist, Law Teacher of the Year 2020
- Hugh McFaul, Runner-up, Times Higher Education Teacher of the Year, and Finalist 2017 and 2020, Thomas Reuter Technology Prize
- Sole nomination Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence 2019
- OU Teaching Award for Excellence in Employability 2019
- Best New Pro Bono Project (Highly Commended) Attorney General Pro Bono Award 2018

The Open University’s mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

We have made a difference in supporting prison based learners

In partnership with St Giles Trust we were involved in approximately 13 prison projects between February 2019 and March 2020 across England and Wales. Around 65 law students have taken part. All the projects involve the students researching general legal topics relevant to prisoners, followed by presentations either in person or over prison radio.

In November 2019 our prison radio project at HMP Altcourse was featured on the BBC Radio 4 programme ‘Law in Action’.

Sarah Couling and Hugh are shown with BBC journalist and programme host Joshua Rozenberg, who is holding a copy of the Open Justice Centre’s Annual Report 2019, outside HMP Altcourse.
We have made a difference in supporting our students’ employability skills

“I enjoyed this course the most and the pro bono public legal education activities helped to secure my new job working with my local council to implement the new Homelessness Act legislation. The pro-bono activities really helped in the interview, especially the client work as I was able to draw upon the experience of researching the client’s legal issue.”

Open Justice Clinic student

“My mentor with the Government Legal Profession has been extremely kind, accommodating, patient and candid in the advice given. Knowledgeable and personable, whilst remaining professional and respectful. I was treated as an equal, and at no point was I made to feel intimidated when I really should have been owing to his calibre. The advice and tips he offered were, and still are, extremely beneficial towards achieving my career goals, and all were offered with a giant pail of humour thrown in. I could not have asked for a better mentor, and I do not think anybody could. I genuinely hope to be as inspiring to others as he has been to me.”

Aqua Koroma Mentoring Scheme student

We have made a difference in our support of the free advice sector

We collaborate with UK and international partners to produce free, open access online resources for learners and charity workers, supporting public understanding of law.

Our free course on Domestic Abuse with Support Through Court was mentioned in Parliament by Justice Secretary Robert Buckland MP.

We have made a difference in supporting other law schools in a pandemic

The Open Justice team held a 90-minute online workshop on 15 May 2020, designed to support legal industry colleagues who suddenly found themselves needing to teach clinical legal education online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

You can access a recording of the webinar below or on our YouTube channel.

We have contributed to a range of national and international public engagement events

Hugh McFaul, UN colleagues and students at Padjadjaran University, Bandung, Indonesia

Hugh at the International Journal of Clinical Legal Education conference, Melbourne 2018

Francine Ryan at Conference on Experiential Learning and Innovations in Legal Education 2019
Jon Paul at Ninth Pan Commonwealth Forum, Edinburgh

We have influenced legal education research and practice engagement events

Over the past five years academics from the Open Justice Centre have produced 16 peer-reviewed articles and two books which have showcased the ground-breaking and sector-leading work of the Centre in opening up clinical legal education to distance learners.

Digital Lawyering: Jones, Emma, Ryan, Francine, Thanaraj, Ann, Wong, Terry. 9780367260781: Amazon.com: Books
The Centre website is a source of updated information about our activities, public access to the online law clinic, knowledge exchange, events and news. Our new and improved site went live in June 2020.

Between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021 there were 12,775 unique visitors to the site, which is 8,433 more than during the same period the previous year. Including return visits, the total rises to 17,067.

Some 50.8% of users typed our address directly or bookmarked us to find us, 44% used a search engine, 6.1% came from social networks and just under 1.1% accessed us through other websites.

Top 12 most popular pages 2020-2021

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website page</th>
<th>Visits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Justice</td>
<td>Main landing page</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom Law Clinic</td>
<td>1,536</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get legal advice</td>
<td>1,375</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Justice blog</td>
<td>841</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet the Open Justice team</td>
<td>776</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working as a witness service volunteer (blog post)</td>
<td>663</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public understanding of law</td>
<td>585</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet the tutors</td>
<td>483</td>
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<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>478</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet the student ambassadors</td>
<td>438</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online domestic abuse resource launched (news item)</td>
<td>417</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Justice research</td>
<td>379</td>
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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 was incorporated into our new website in spring 2020 and visitors now have the option to sign up for a monthly newsletter that details the recent blog posts.

We published 36 blog pieces from July 2020 to July 2021. Above is a screen shot of a recent post.
This year we continued to concentrate our efforts on promoting our events, student activities, webinars, news coverage and blog posts.

Traffic-wise on the account we have been consistently busy this year. Between August 2020 and September 2021, we had 18,338 visits and 121,984 ‘impressions’ (the number of times a tweet showed up in somebody’s timeline). This is a considerable increase on previous years’ totals and our busiest social media year so far.

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

Twitter account report

Between June 2020 and August 2021, we gained 354 new followers, taking us to 1,392 followers. We are delighted with this progress.
AWARDS SHORTLISTS
NOMINATIONS IN 2020-2021

Francine Ryan, Co-Director of the Open Justice Centre, was a finalist in the Law Teacher of the Year Award. Sponsored by Oxford University Press (OUP), the Award is designed to recognise exceptional teachers in the legal field.

Hugh McFaul, Senior Lecturer and Co-Director of The Open University’s Open Justice Centre, was highly commended in the Most Innovative Teacher of the Year category at The Times Higher Education (THE) Awards in November 2020. The THE Awards recognised outstanding work and exceptional performance across the higher education sector for 2018-19.

It is not standard practice to highly commend participants in The THE Awards. But judges said that for this particular category they had “wrestled so much with their decision that they decided two others should be commended for their inspirational teaching” out of the eight shortlisted entrants.

Hugh said: “I was delighted to be highly commended. Really, I see it as a joint effort, because I simply could not do it without the brilliant team around me in the Open Justice Centre. It is also good news for the legal industry, because it recognises the positive impact that pro bono legal work can have on communities across the UK. It is also, of course, excellent news for the Open Justice Centre and reflective of our innovative, forward-thinking approach to education and social justice.”

Following the virtual Awards night, Hugh tweeted: “Proud to have brought back a silver medal for the #OUfamily.”

The Education for Justice initiative (E4J) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in which The Open University has played a pivotal role, won the United Nations Secretary-General 2020 Innovation award. The prestigious global award recognises the vital work that E4J does to directly engage children, youth, teachers and academics to promote crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law through accessible educational tools.

The five-hour online course designed by the Open Justice Centre in partnership with the UNODC has so far reached 5,000 educators and has been translated into Spanish, with other translations planned.

OU students receive top scholarship awards from prestigious Gray’s Inn

Three Open University Law students have been awarded scholarships from the highly regarded Gray’s Inn – one of the four Inns of Court which has the exclusive right to call men and women to the Bar of England and Wales. The prestigious scholarships recognise merit, intellectual ability, advocacy and drive and determination to succeed at the Bar. The scholarship programme promotes equality and diversity in the legal profession, ensuring that the best people are attracted to a legal career, regardless of their background.

OU students Laurie-Elizabeth Ketley (29), Liam Chin (33) and Eleanor Mayhew-Hills (26) will now all receive full or part funding from Gray’s Inn to complete their Bar Professional Training Course. Laurie-Elizabeth has received the Baroness Hale of Richmond Scholarship, which is one of the Inn’s most prestigious Bar Course Scholarships, reserved for outstanding candidates of exceptional merit.

“A lack of funds should not prevent candidates being able to access the legal profession. The scholarship system enables talented students to achieve their goals and supports them in their ambition to practise law,” said Francine Ryan, Co-Director of The Open University’s Open Justice Centre.
Open Justice Student Awards 2021

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
Danielle Rees and Rachel Innes

Danielle Rees – Individual winner

Danielle took part in the e-Mediation project where students are given the chance to undertake training in civil and commercial mediation. They get to experience how mediation skills, typically used in a face-to-face context, can be adapted to enable mediation in an online context. They then have the opportunity to apply the skills they have developed as mediators in a mock online mediation. This project provides students with valuable negotiation skills which can be applied in many aspects of life.

Danielle's tutor Andrew Maxfield nominated her for this award and said: “Danielle adopted a professional approach throughout the project. She was supportive and encouraging of her team members and demonstrated a positive, solution-focused approach to all the challenges and opportunities of the project.”

Danielle said: “The Open Justice activities have not only provided a diversity of work experience available to me as a student living in a remote location but also the opportunity, at a critical juncture in my legal journey, to reflect on why as a mature student I was undertaking this difficult and expensive path. Experienced and supportive tutors in an inclusive and accessible programme allowed me to realign my motivations. The experience will always provide me with a point of reference to ensure my practice reflects my passion for greater access to social justice.”

Rachel Innes – Individual winner runner up

Rachel took part in the Open Justice Law Clinic project. Students in the Open Justice Law Clinic 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.

Rachel was nominated by her tutor Lizzie Fusco for this award. She said: “Rachel demonstrated outstanding leadership in steering her team through the Open Justice law clinic, keeping them motivated and on track in their casework.”

Rachel said: “I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to undertake pro bono with the clinic, it truly has shaped my journey to become a lawyer. The work that the Open Justice Law Clinic undertakes both for student experience and access to justice is truly fantastic and will forever stay in my heart. As a result of my student blog being published, I was offered some legal blog work and just had my first one accepted and purchased from me (on the new no-fault divorce law).”

You can read Rachel’s blog [here](#).
Outstanding team contribution to Open Justice

*Jack Burton and Phillipe Morales*

The team award this year went to two students who worked on the Policy Clinic project. In the Policy Clinic students work as a team on a brief related to one public policy area which is either the subject of consultation by government or is an area of the law where reform has been suggested.

Jack and Phillipe collaborated on research into the cost of civil weddings in order to inform the Law Commissions’ ‘Wedding’ project, which will propose reform of the law which regulates how people can get married in England and Wales. Their joint research report, ‘The cost of civil marriage ceremonies in England and Wales at non-religious approved venues’, contained information about the current fees charged by local authorities across England and Wales and analysis of the possible causes of these costs. They found no cause for the widely differing fees charged by local authorities and made a number of recommendations focused on ensuring less variation in the costs of civil weddings and the need for local authorities to be more transparent about their costs.

Their report has been published on The Open University’s online research pages and is available to download [here](#).

They were nominated for an award by their tutor Laura Platts who said: “Jack and Phillipe developed a strong working relationship and I would like to nominate them jointly for an Open Justice award due to the quality of their research, analysis and final report and the extra work which they put in when they lost a member of their group.”

Project manager Liz Hardie said: “The quality of the report produced by Jack and Phillipe was excellent and of the highest standard. Their report was sent to the Law Commission as part of its consultation into the law on weddings, and the Law Commission requested it was published and made openly available. We are therefore expecting the Law Commission to reference the report as part of their recommendations for reform, which demonstrates the quality and thoroughness of their work.”

Jack Burton said: “I would just like to say thank you for allowing me to study W360. The experience was one of the highlights of my entire time at The Open University and was easily one of the most enjoyable modules I studied.”
Runners up for outstanding team contribution to Open Justice
Megan Stretton, Christina Beadle, Claire Alexandra McIntyre, Lisa Gamble, Megan Connors, Ibtisam Abdulaziz Mohamed, Grace Emmanuel, Emma Jane Marshall

The runners up this year comprise of two teams who worked on the Policy Clinic project that we ran in conjunction with our partner, the Environmental Law Foundation. A member of the team, Claire McIntyre, wrote a blog about working on the project for the Law Society of Scotland which you can read here.

They were nominated by their tutor Gillian Mawdsley who said:

“This was a project which showcased The Open University and pro bono work as the students were working in conjunction with other universities. The project brief was demanding. It covered climate change which is going to be an essential area of law for all going forward. The teams brought energy, dedication, intelligence, and commitment to the project. They gelled effectively with a strong work ethos helping the members of the team who found the commitment more challenging. Without such a supportive role being undertaken by each of them to each other, they would not have been able to come together and submit an interim report which was assessed of being a high standard. This required impressive research skills as well as managing and digesting a considerable volume of unfamiliar information, similar to the skills required from legal professionals. With their diverse range of time commitments and experience, the fact that this was achieved was credit to the hardworking nature of the team members.”

The full report can be accessed here.

Team member Christina Beadle said: “My experience on the Open Justice project opened my eyes to other areas of law that I can make valuable contributions to. I thoroughly enjoyed working on my assigned project and understanding how my group’s contributions were used to facilitate a change.”
INTERNATIONAL LECTURES, CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS

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

In addition, we have disseminated our practice internally via OU events including the Centre for Innovation in Legal and Business Education (SCLAB) practice-based learning series event in October 2021. We also presented to the Scottish Nation Office on the work of the Centre with a view to potentially developing an Open Educational Resource on Scottish planning law.

LEARNING BY DOING: THE UK’S FIRST MEDIATION CLINIC CONFERENCE. THE UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE, GLASGOW
February 2021

Liz Hardie and Ben Waters of Canterbury Christ Church University shared their experience of starting a mediation clinic as part of a workshop at Learning by Doing: the UK’s First Mediation Clinic Conference. The conference was hosted by University of Strathclyde on 6 February 2021.

INSTITUTE OF INNOVATION IN LEGAL TECHNOLOGY
June 2021

Francine was invited to be a panel member at the Institute of Innovation in Legal Technology audience of over 50 international academics. Queen Mary University in London.

ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL
June 2021

Francine gave a guest lecture at Aberystwyth University Law School on legal tech and legal design.

INVITED GUEST LECTURE AT LUSIADA UNIVERSITY, PORTO
March 2021

Hugh delivered a guest lecture on how universities can support the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals at Lusiada University in Porto in March 2021.

OPENMINDS LIVE ALUMNI EVENT WEBINAR
June 2021

In June 2021 the Open Justice Centre Co-Directors shared Open Justice Centre successes and experiences at the OpenMINDS Live alumni event. The event can be viewed here.
Hugh is an invited guest lecturer in December 2021 for the University of Valencia where he’ll deliver a lecture entitled ‘Limitarianism as a response to inequality.’
Student Eleanor Mayhew Hills appeared in the Hexham Courant print newspaper and on Hexham-courant.co.uk in May 2021 in relation to the legal scholarship award she received.

A case study on our mentoring scheme was chosen for inclusion in the Employability Best Practice Guide. The compendium has now been collated and is available via this link on the Open University Employability Hub.

Francine Ryan and Hugh McFaul contributed to the new Times Higher Education (THE) Campus site. You can view Francine’s presentation here: 'How The Open University Law School has tackled fieldwork training online'.

Blog posts by Liz Hardie and Hugh McFaul appeared in the blog for Centre for Innovation in Legal and Business Education (SCiLAB):

View Hugh’s presentation here:
Soft skills: how to promote student collaboration in online environments. [THE Campus Learn, Share, Connect timeshighereducation.com]
Interest in the Centre's research and scholarship continues to grow and has been the subject of increased attention due to the relevance of online teaching methods during the ongoing pandemic.

Some highlights are given below, and a full list of published articles is available at our website. We are pleased to have created a new section this year where student research will be published.

In December 2020 the Open Justice Centre’s Co-Directors, Hugh McFaul and Francine Ryan, edited a special issue of the International Journal of Clinical Legal Education entitled ‘Clinical and Public Legal Education: Responses to Coronavirus’. It is further recognition of the ground-breaking and sector-leading work of the Centre in opening up clinical legal education to distance learners.

Most publications below are available for free, for personal use from The Open University’s Open Access library or by request to the first author, who can be contacted via open-justice@open.ac.uk

Many are published journal articles which can also be obtained through university libraries for those with access.


RESEARCH OUTPUTS


Recent articles by Open Justice Centre students and alumni

Associate Lecturers and project support 2010-2021

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

We’d also like to congratulate Keren Bright on her retirement from The Open University and thank her for leading our prison engagement projects over the last five years. Keren’s latest journal article is based on her experience of running these projects and was co-written with Maria McNichol of the St Giles Trust.

Thank you to:

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Members of the Open Justice Team 2019-2020 in Edinburgh, summer 2019