

2026
*Year in
Review*

LLM Criminology,
Criminal Justice
& Human Rights



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GAILLIMHE
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Scoil an Dlí
School of Law

Welcome from Programme Director

I am delighted to present this Year in Review for the LLM in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Human Rights.

I am Dr Róisín Mulgrew, Associate Professor in Law and Cluster Lead of the Crime, Punishment and Rights Research Cluster in the School of Law at the University of Galway. This is a joint programme with the Irish Centre for Human Rights. This programme sits within our research cluster, a very dynamic and engaged research community, and you will see more of its work reflected throughout this document.

From the outset, our aim is to provide students with a rounded and meaningful experience. That goes well beyond the classroom. Alongside our teaching, we place a strong emphasis on engagement with practice, research activity, and a range of extracurricular opportunities that allow students to explore the issues we study in a more applied and reflective way.

What comes through in the pages that follow is the breadth of that experience. From guest lectures and field visits, to reading groups and public events, students are encouraged to engage critically with the criminal justice system in all its complexity, while also developing their own interests and perspectives.

We are very fortunate to work with such a committed and engaged group of students each year. Supporting you in your development, academically and professionally, is something we take great pride in. We are also always open to ideas and suggestions on how we can continue to enrich the student experience, whether you are undertaking the programme full-time (one year) or part-time (over two years).

I hope this Year in Review gives you a sense of what it is like to study here, and of the vibrant and supportive environment you will be part of on our beautiful campus in the west of Ireland.

Róisín Mulgrew



Dr Róisín Mulgrew,
Associate Professor in Law,
Cluster Lead of the Crime, Punishment and
Rights Research Cluster,
School of Law, University of Galway.



Induction and LLM Student Experience

This section highlights key aspects of the student experience on the LLM in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Human Rights, from induction and academic development to opportunities for engagement beyond the classroom. Together, these activities reflect the programme's commitment to providing a rounded and supportive learning environment.

Induction and Welcome to Galway: Walking Tour of the City

The programme for students on the LLM in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Human Rights began with induction in September 2025, introducing students to the structure of the programme, module choices, and key academic supports as they commenced their studies. As part of this induction, students participated in a Law and Criminal Justice Walking Tour of Galway, led by Dr Charles O'Mahony. The tour brought students across the campus and city, visiting a range of significant sites including the Quadrangle, Galway Cathedral, the Courthouse, Eyre Square, and the site of the former Magdalene Laundry on Forster Street. The walking tour introduced the historical and social context of criminal justice in Ireland, highlighting the connections between legal history and the built environment.

Criminology Reading Group Enhances Student Engagement Beyond the Classroom

LLM students recently took part in a Criminology Reading Group led by Dr Illan Wall, developed as an extra-curricular initiative to support engagement with criminological scholarship beyond the curriculum of the suite of LLM options.

Running throughout semester 2 2026, the reading group created a space for students to come together outside of scheduled teaching to engage in critical discussion and extended reading. The initiative was designed to complement the LLM programme by encouraging students to explore key texts in greater depth and to develop their analytical and discussion skills in a more informal and collaborative way. A distinctive feature of the reading group was its student-led dimension. LLM students were actively involved in selecting materials, contributing to a sense of shared ownership and ensuring that the themes reflected their interests. The programme included a range of influential and contemporary works, from *Policing the Crisis* to texts on cultural criminology, southern criminology, punishment, and surveillance. The reading group fostered a supportive environment where students could engage openly with complex ideas, test arguments, and build confidence in articulating their perspectives. It also provided an important opportunity to strengthen connections between students and to contribute to the wider research culture within the School of Law. For incoming students, start thinking about what criminology readings you would like to suggest for next year's reading group.





In Conversation with the Director of Public Prosecutions: Catherine Pierse

Students on the LLM had the opportunity to attend a special event with the Director of Public Prosecutions, Catherine Pierse, who visited the University of Galway as part of a series of engagements marking the 50th anniversary of the Office of the DPP on the 6th of November 2025. Before the event, the DPP held a special session with students on the LLM. In this smaller setting, students were able to ask questions directly and engage in a detailed discussion with the Director of Public Prosecutions about her work, the role of her Office.

The event itself was held in the Human Biology Building, took the form of a public conversation between Catherine Pierse and Dr Charles O'Mahony, and brought together students, staff and members of the wider community for an in-depth discussion on the role and work of the Office of the DPP. The format allowed for a wide-ranging and reflective exchange, moving from Catherine's early career in criminal defence through to her leadership of one of the most important institutions in the Irish criminal justice system

A central theme of the discussion was the principle of independence in prosecution. The DPP reflected on the importance of maintaining independence while also ensuring transparency and accountability in a modern justice system, particularly in an era of heightened public scrutiny and instant commentary. She spoke about the challenges of leading an Office that must make difficult decisions in complex and often

often sensitive cases, and the need to ensure that those decisions are grounded in fairness, evidence and the rule of law.

The conversation also explored the changing nature of prosecution work. The DPP highlighted the increasing complexity of cases involving digital evidence, transnational crime and large volumes of data. She spoke about the ways in which the Office engages with these challenges, including through collaboration with prosecution services across Europe and internationally to identify best practice and to respond to shared difficulties, particularly in the management and analysis of digital material.

Another important aspect of the discussion was the experience of victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system. She emphasised the evolving role of the Office in supporting victims, including developments following the Victims of Crime Act 2017 and ongoing efforts to ensure that the system is accessible to people with additional needs. The conversation reflected a broader commitment to ensuring that justice is not only done, but experienced as fair by those who come into contact with the system.

The School of Law is very grateful to Catherine Pierse for her generosity in sharing her time and insights, and for what was a thoughtful, engaging and highly valuable discussion for students on the LLM programme.



LLM Thesis Workshop: Developing Your Capstone Research Project

On the 5th February 2026, the School of Law hosted an online Thesis Information Session for students across its LLM programmes, including the LLM in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Human Rights. The session provided students with guidance on the minor thesis, which forms the capstone of the LLM programme. It covered key aspects of the thesis process, including submission requirements, deadlines, research methods, and the importance of academic integrity. Students were also advised on selecting supervisors and maintaining effective engagement throughout the research process. The minor thesis represents an important opportunity for students to undertake independent research in an area of interest and to contribute to ongoing academic and policy debates. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about their thesis topics from Semester 1, allowing time to identify a clear research question and engage with relevant literature.

Crime, Punishment and Rights Film Series

As part of the Crime, Punishment and Rights Film Series, students attended a screening of *12 Angry Men* at Pálás Cinema on the 26th of November 2025. The film was introduced by Dr Conor Hanly, who provided context on its enduring relevance to issues of jury decision-making, reasonable doubt, and the dynamics of deliberation within the criminal trial process. The screening offered students an opportunity to reflect critically on the role of the jury and the safeguards of fairness within the justice system. While only one film was screened this year due to changes in operations at the Pálás Cinema, the series remains an important feature of the programme, and we look forward to expanding it again in the coming year with input from LLM students on the selection of films.



Field Trips and Experiential Learning

This section highlights opportunities for LLM students to engage directly with the criminal justice system through field trip and related experiential learning opportunities.

Visit to the Criminal Courts Complex

On the 20th of March 2026, students on the LLM travelled to Dublin to visit the Criminal Courts of Justice. The visit provided an important opportunity for students to engage directly with the Irish criminal justice system and to see how the courts operate in practice in particular when dealing with serious crimes prosecuted on indictment. Students met with Mr Justice Peter Charleton, Judge of the Supreme Court and Adjunct Professor at the University of Galway, who spoke about his work and experience on the bench. They also met with Mr Justice Alexander Owens of the Court of Appeal in the judges' library, where there was discussion of the appellate process and judicial decision-making. Students also had the opportunity to meet Ms Justice Karen O'Connor of the High Court, which is known as the Central Criminal Court when dealing with criminal matters. A particular highlight of the visit was the opportunity to observe a jury being impanelled, providing a direct insight into a key stage of the criminal trial process. The visit included a tour of the Criminal Courts Complex Building and an opportunity to meet with judicial assistants working within the Courts Service. This provided valuable insight into the day-to-day operation of the courts and potential career pathways for graduates of the programme. The visit formed an important part of the LLM programme's emphasis on connecting academic study with practice, and students found the experience engaging and informative. The School of Law is very grateful to the members of the judiciary and Courts Service who facilitated the visit.



Visit to Limerick Prison

On the 27th of November 2025, students from the LLM travelled to Limerick Prison. The visit provided students with a valuable opportunity to gain first-hand insight into the operation of the Irish prison system. Students were given a guided tour of both the older and newer prison facilities, including the female wings, which allowed them to observe directly the physical environment in which imprisonment is experienced.

A central feature of the visit was the opportunity to engage with those working and detained within the prison. Students met with prison officers and members of the prison management team, including governors, and were able to discuss the day-to-day operations of the prison, the challenges facing the prison service, and the operation of rehabilitation initiatives.

The visit forms an important part of the LLM programme's emphasis on critical and reflective learning. It enables LLM students to move beyond theoretical analysis and to engage directly with the realities of imprisonment, deepening their understanding of the relationship between law, policy, and criminal justice practice.

The School of Law is very grateful to the staff and management of Limerick Prison for facilitating the visit.

Right to Protest: Legal Observers Training and Research Group

As part of the LW5216 Policing, Security and Rights module led by Dr Illan Wall, a group of LLM students participated in a training session with the Irish Network of Legal Observers in Limerick. The training was delivered by Emily Williams of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties in collaboration with Dr Wall. Approximately ten students completed the training, which focused on the role of legal observers in the context of public protest. The session examined how protests are policed in practice, the legal frameworks governing public order, and the function of legal observers in documenting interactions between protesters and police.

Alongside this training, students participated in a Right to Protest research group, which explored legal and policy issues relating to the regulation and policing of protest. This provided an opportunity to engage more critically with themes developed in the module, particularly in relation to public order, state power, and the protection of civil liberties.



Beyond the Seminar Room: Bringing Criminal Justice to Life

The following is a selection of guest seminars and masterclasses delivered as part of the programme over the past year. These sessions are an important feature of the LLM, bringing a wide range of expertise and perspectives into the seminar room. They provide students with the opportunity to engage with leading practitioners and researchers working across different areas of criminal justice and human rights.

Conference on Public Interest Litigation and Access to Justice

Students on the LLM attended the conference Public Interest Litigation and Access to Justice: Domestic and International Challenges and Opportunities, held at the University of Galway on the 14th and 15th of November 2025. The conference organised by Prof. Donncha O'Connell brought together leading academics, practitioners, and representatives from statutory bodies and NGOs to examine the role of litigation in advancing access to justice. Students engaged with a wide range of perspectives, from strategic litigation and international mechanisms to the practical challenges faced by practitioners and litigants. The conference provided a valuable opportunity to connect themes explored on the programme with current debates in law, policy, and practice. In particular, it highlighted that many of the issues encountered within the criminal justice system are closely linked to broader questions of unmet legal need, often requiring remedies through the civil justice system.



Training on Trafficking

In semester 2 students on the LLM were offered the opportunity to participate in a series of training sessions on sexual exploitation awareness delivered by Ruhama in partnership with Galway City Council. Ruhama is an Irish NGO that offers nationwide support to women impacted by prostitution, human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. A number of students registered for and attended these sessions, which focused on issues including trafficking, trauma-informed responses, and the impact of conflict and exploitation. Those who participated found the training highly valuable, particularly in connecting legal and policy frameworks with the lived realities of those affected by trafficking.



Guest Seminar on the Right to Health of Women and Infants in Detention

Professor Van Hout, Adjunct Professor, Crime Punishment and Rights Cluster delivered a guest seminar on the 23rd of March 2026 to students on the LLM module *Minority Groups and the Criminal Justice System*.

The seminar examined the right to health of women and infants in prisons and immigration detention, with a particular focus on pregnant and breastfeeding. Professor Van Hout highlighted the complex health needs of women in detention, including histories of trauma, mental health problems, and substance dependence, as well as the additional risks that arise during pregnancy and the perinatal period. A central theme of the session was the obligation on states to ensure equivalence of healthcare for people in detention, and the extent to which this standard is often not realised in practice. Students engaged with evidence of inadequate conditions in many jurisdictions, including overcrowding, lack of access to specialist maternity care, and failures to meet basic standards of dignity and safety.

The seminar also explored the situation of children in prison and the challenges involved in balancing the best interests of the child with the right to family life. Professor Van Hout examined the absence of consistent international standards and the variation in approaches across jurisdictions, as well as the long-term and intergenerational impacts of maternal imprisonment. The session highlighted the growing recognition of the need for community-based alternatives to imprisonment for pregnant women and primary caregivers. The use of video materials added depth to the discussion and helped to illustrate the lived realities behind the legal and policy frameworks. Students responded very positively to the seminar and found it both engaging and challenging.

Right to Health, Medical Ethics and Prison Environments



Investigative Journalism and Public Accountability: Conor Ryan Masterclass

The Crime, Punishment and Rights Research Cluster hosted an engaging and highly insightful masterclass with Conor Ryan of the RTÉ Investigations Unit. The event brought together members of the research cluster alongside students from the LLM for an interesting exploration of the role of investigative journalism in exposing injustice and wrongdoing.

Drawing on over a decade of experience, Conor Ryan guided attendees through a series of major investigations he has led, offering a behind the scenes account of how complex public interest stories are developed, researched and brought to broadcast. Central to the discussion was the recent RTÉ Investigates: The Psychiatric Care Scandal (2026), a two part documentary examining Ireland's mental health and the prison system. The programme exposed significant delays and systemic failures within forensic mental health services, including at the Central Mental Health Hospital, and highlighted the lived experiences of people and families affected by the criminalisation of mental illness. Conor also reflected on a number of earlier investigations, including RTÉ Investigates: Horses – Making a Killing (2024), which uncovered serious abuses and regulatory failures in the horse industry across Europe; RTÉ Investigates: The Department, The Data & The Disclosure (2021), which revealed the unlawful creation of dossiers on children with autism; and RTÉ Investigates: Greyhounds Running for Their Lives (2019), which exposed serious animal welfare violations.

Through these examples, he demonstrated the breadth of investigative techniques employed in his work, from undercover reporting and data analysis to long form documentary storytelling.

The masterclass provided valuable insight into the legal, ethical and practical challenges of investigative journalism. Conor also spoke candidly about the painstaking research involved in this work, the risks associated with investigative work, and the ethical considerations that arise when working with vulnerable people and sensitive material. His reflections on navigating legal constraints, ensuring accuracy, and maintaining public trust offered a valuable perspective for students interested in criminal justice, human rights and regulatory accountability. He also screened selected clips from his documentaries, allowing attendees to see first-hand how investigative work is translated into impactful storytelling. The examples used illustrated the power of journalism in uncovering wrongdoing and driving public debate, regulatory action and, in some cases, criminal investigation.



Helen Hall Addresses Students on Policing Accountability and Public Sector Leadership

Students on the LLM module LW5216 Policing, Security and Rights, led by Dr Illan Wall, attended a guest seminar by Helen Hall, Chief Executive of the Policing and Community Safety Authority on the 13th of November 2025. The event formed part of the School's ongoing engagement with leading practitioners in the field of policing and criminal justice. The session focused on contemporary developments in policing accountability, including issues relating to stop and search, the policing of protest, and broader questions of oversight and reform. Helen Hall provided valuable insight into the evolving landscape of policing and the role of independent accountability mechanisms in strengthening public trust in policing. In addition to these themes, the lecture also offered a more personal perspective on leadership in the public sector. Helen Hall, who is widely recognised as an excellent leader in the public sector.



Guest Seminar by Mr Justice John Edwards

On 12th November 2025, Mr Justice John Edwards, of the Court of Appeal, delivered a guest lecture to the LLM students. The lecture concerned the development of sentencing guidance judgments in Ireland. The lecture was delivered as part of Rory Kelly's module LW485 Sentencing and Penal Law Policy. As well as being an appellate judge, Mr Justice Edwards is a member of the Sentencing Guidelines and Information Committee.

Guest Seminar with the Irish Council for Civil Liberties

On the 6th of November 2025, students on the LLM attended a guest seminar delivered by Emily Williams, Police and Criminal Justice Officer at the Irish Council for Civil Liberties. The seminar focused on the oversight of policing, including both complaints mechanisms and the broader monitoring of policing policy and practice. Emily provided valuable insight into the role of the ICCL as Ireland's oldest human rights organisation and its work in promoting accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system.



Masterclass on Criminal Justice Decision-Making

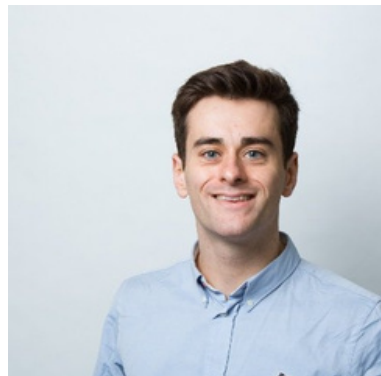
On the 3rd of November 2025, students on the LLM attended a masterclass delivered by Dr Diarmuid Griffin on the complex nature of decision-making within the criminal justice system. The seminar explored how discretion, risk, and rehabilitation operate across areas such as sentencing, parole, and probation in Ireland. Drawing on recent research, the masterclass provided students with a deeper understanding of the layered and often interconnected processes that shape outcomes within the criminal justice system.

Guest Seminar on Advocacy and Criminal Justice Reform with the Irish Penal Reform Trust

On the 10th of October 2025, students on the LLM participated in a seminar on bridging disciplinary divides through campaigns and advocacy, with a particular focus on the role of non-governmental organisations in driving reform. In the seminar, students were joined by Niamh McCormack and Tom Lord from the Irish Penal Reform Trust, who provided an NGO perspective on advancing criminal justice reform in Ireland.

Guest Seminar on Sentencing Guidelines: Professor Julian Roberts KC (Hon)

On the 15th of October 2025, students on the LLM attended a guest seminar delivered by Professor Julian Roberts KC (Hon) of the University of Oxford. The lecture, titled Inside the Guidelines: The Evolution of Sentencing Guidance in England and Wales, 2004-2025, provided an examination of the development and operation of sentencing guidelines in England and Wales. This was part of Dr Rory Kelly's module LW485 Sentencing and Penal Law Policy. Professor Roberts explored the structure and impact of offence-specific sentencing guidelines, drawing comparisons with other international models and reflecting on over two decades of empirical research in the area. The seminar also addressed recent developments, including proposed legislative changes and their potential implications for the independence of the Sentencing Council.



Publishing from Your LLM: From Minor Thesis to Peer-Reviewed Research

Emily Donnellan, a graduate of the LLM in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Human Rights, returned to the School of Law to deliver an engaging and highly practical seminar on careers in legal research and publishing on the 27th of March 2026. Now working as a Legal and Knowledge Management Researcher with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Emily has built an impressive publication record, successfully transforming her postgraduate research into peer-reviewed journal articles, including forthcoming work in the Irish Jurist. Her return to the programme provided students with an opportunity to learn from a recent graduate. Drawing on her own experience, Emily offered strategic guidance on how students can develop their research beyond the LLM. She provided concrete examples of how her own essays evolved into published articles; she demystified the publication process and encouraged students to see their coursework as the foundation for future peer-reviewed publications. Her insights into writing style, structure, and publication opportunities were complemented by practical advice on building a research profile and pursuing careers in research.



Advancing Research and Global Engagement in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Human Rights

This section highlights the role of research and global engagement in shaping the LLM. It outlines the work of the Crime, Punishment and Rights Research Cluster and the ways in which research-led teaching and international collaboration enrich the student experience at Galway.

About the Crime, Punishment and Rights Research Cluster

The Crime, Punishment and Rights Research Cluster plays an important role in the LLM. Members of the teaching faculty on the programme, together with PhD researchers in the School of Law, are active participants in the Cluster. This creates a strong and direct link between research and teaching, ensuring that students are engaging with contemporary debates, and cutting-edge scholarship in criminal justice and human rights. The Cluster brings together researchers working across law, criminology, penology, and human rights, and reflects a commitment to interdisciplinary and research-led teaching. The work of the Cluster spans a wide range of areas, including but not limited to policing and accountability, sentencing, prisons and penal policy, access to justice, international criminal law, and the rights of minority groups within the criminal justice system.

Over the past year, the Cluster has been involved in a broad range of activities, including research publications, policy engagement, media contributions, and public events. This has included contributions to national and international debates on issues such as the policing of protest, prison conditions and mental health, access to justice for people with

disabilities, sentencing reform, and the regulation of emerging technologies in criminal justice. Members of the Cluster have also been involved in major research projects, collaborations with national and international organisations, and engagement with bodies such as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Council of Europe, and United Nations agencies.

[Learn more about our Research Cluster here.](#)

Strengthening Global Engagement in Criminology, Criminal Justice and Human Rights

The Crime, Punishment and Rights Research Cluster was delighted to welcome two Adjunct Professors, Professor Marie Claire Van Hout, Vice President for Research, Innovation and Impact at South East Technological University, and Professor Zhiyuan Guo of China University of Political Science and Law. Both appointments were approved by the President of the University of Galway on the recommendation of the Academic Promotions Committee. Their terms will run from the 1st of February 2026 to the 31st of January 2029. These appointments will contribute significantly to the LLM, including through guest seminars, research engagement, and international collaboration.





Professor Marie Claire Van Hout

Professor Marie Claire Van Hout is Professor of International Health and Human Rights and Vice President for Research, Innovation and Impact at South East Technological University. She brings over 20 years of research experience in the areas of penal policy, human rights law, prison systems, health inequalities, and health in detention. Her work is internationally recognised, with over €14 million in research funding, more than 300 peer-reviewed publications, and extensive engagement with international organisations, including the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the Council of Europe. Her research focuses on the intersection of criminal justice and public health, particularly in relation to vulnerable populations in detention. Professor Van Hout's appointment reflects the School's commitment to interdisciplinary and globally engaged scholarship, particularly at the intersection of criminal justice, human rights, and health.



Professor Zhiyuan Guo

Professor Zhiyuan Guo is Professor of Law and Vice Dean of the College of Criminal Justice at China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing. Her expertise spans criminal procedure, evidence law, international human rights law, and law and society. Professor Guo has an extensive international profile, having held visiting positions at institutions including New York University, Stanford Law School, and the University of Hong Kong. Her research engages with key issues in criminal justice reform, including exclusionary rules of evidence, plea bargaining, lay participation, and mental health law. Her appointment strengthens the comparative and international dimension of the LLM programme and provides students with valuable insights into criminal justice systems beyond the common law tradition.





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