



# LLM Clinical Legal Education

Annual Report  
2014 -15



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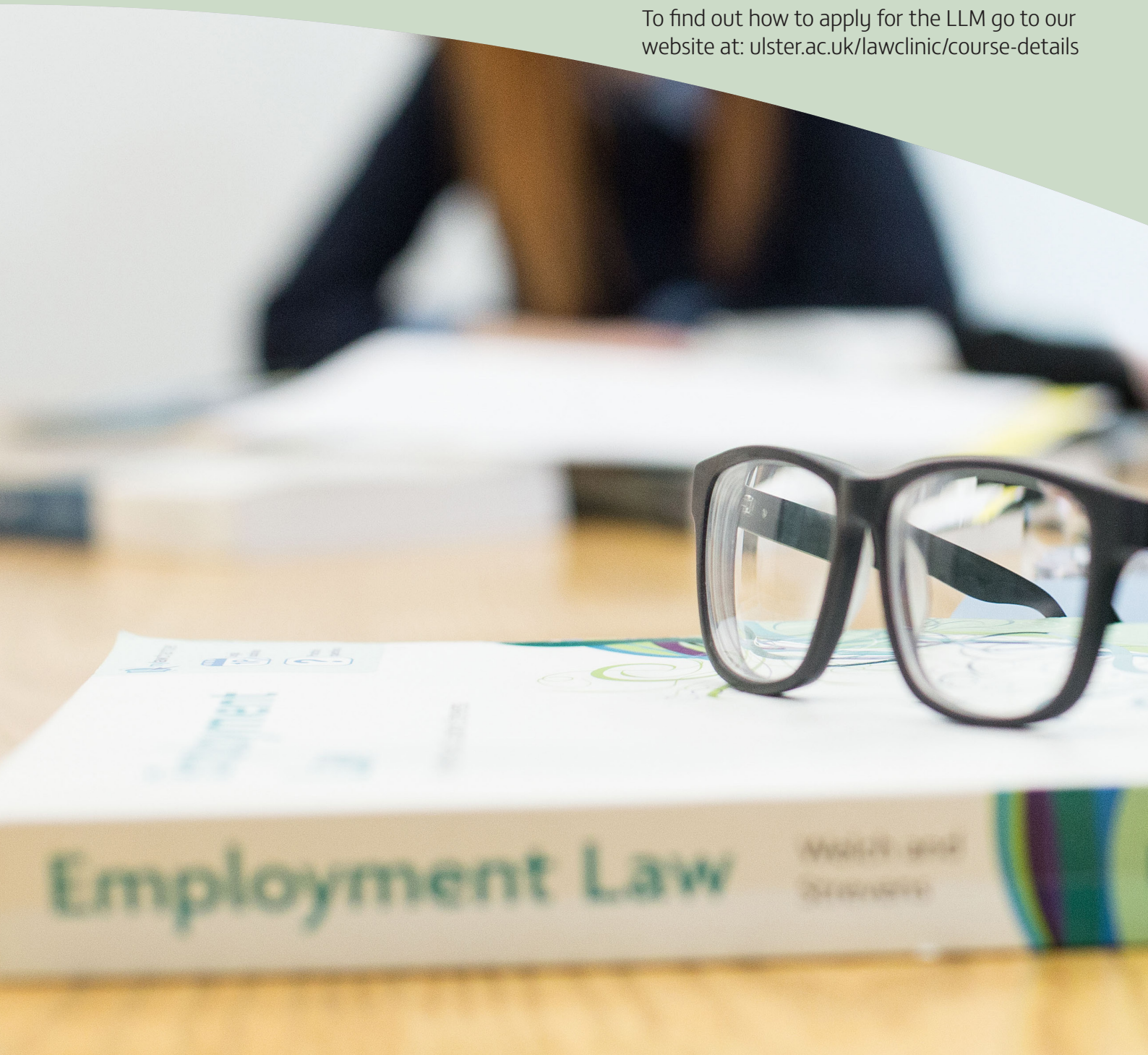
## Annual Report 2014 -15

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The LLM Clinical Legal Education has now completed its third year and has gone from strength to strength in its core mission of meeting unmet legal need in social security and employment law areas, while educating and training the next generation of access to justice lawyers.

The LLM is designed to train students in the substantive law of social security and employment, to develop skills relevant to advising and representing social security and employment tribunal cases, to understand the access to justice needs of these tribunal populations and to deliver – through our Ulster University Law Clinic case-work and research – some solutions to the perennial problem of unmet legal need.

To find out how to apply for the LLM go to our website at: [ulster.ac.uk/lawclinic/course-details](http://ulster.ac.uk/lawclinic/course-details)





# Casework

In 2014-15, LLM Clinical Legal Education students in the Ulster University Law Clinic provided over 350 hours of free legal advice and representation across a range of social security and employment law problems, under Clinic staff supervision. To date, 16 cases have been closed, or substantially completed, by student clinicians: 12 employment and four social security cases. A further eight cases remain open – six social security and two employment cases – which will be taken forward by the 2015-16 student cohort, and by our graduates who remain involved with the work of the Ulster University Law Clinic.

The employment cases have been complex, relating to protected disclosures (whistle-blowing), race discrimination, dismissal for capability consistent with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and constructive dismissal. For the first time, student clinicians have also represented at employment law Case Management Discussions leading to successfully negotiated settlements on behalf of our clients. Student skills

in this area have been honed through a mock-Case Management Discussion run by our Visiting Professor Paul Mason, Head of Employment (Ireland) at Pinsent Masons, and through participation in a simulated industrial tribunal hearing run by Legal Island.

Case-work in social security has covered specialised issues within disability living allowance (DLA) appeals that have included the potentially discriminatory impact of the statutory test for visual impairment that allows claimants to qualify for the high rate mobility component of DLA. This has resulted in an appeal on a point of law to the Social Security Commissioner, adding to our student expertise in social security. Students have also taken on a wide range of social security cases with our placement partner, the Legal Support Project at Law Centre NI, with each student providing specialist legal advice and representation on an average of three social security cases. In addition, our collaboration with the Legal Support Officer at Citizens Advice Regional Office has led to one of our students representing a Citizens Advice client at a Social Security Commissioner's hearing.

As in previous years, students have benefited from the insights of social security caseworkers from Law Centre NI and Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service, through specialist lectures, work shadowing and a mock social security tribunal chaired by Dr Kenneth Mullan, the Chief Social Security and Child Support Commissioner.

**“ I would like to thank you for everything you have done for me and I feel the services you offer are exceptional. Many thanks. ”**

*Ulster University Law Clinic Client*

**“ I am very grateful for the way [the student] has handled my case from beginning to end. My sisters and I tried to get answers for several months from my employer but were not successful. I would like to thank the student for all her hard work. ”**

*Ulster University Law Clinic Client*

# Research

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2014 UK Research Ranking	Institution
1	King's College London
2	LSE
3	Durham
4	Ulster University
5	UCL
6	York
7	Cambridge
8	Leeds
9	Bristol
10	Oxford

In 2014 the Law School's research, including the research that underpins the LLM and the work of the Clinic, ranked as fourth in the UK in the national Research Exercise Framework.

Building on this success the Clinic team has been awarded significant funding from the Legal Education Foundation to understand where university law clinics sit on the access to justice landscape. We are delighted to have appointed Dr Orla Drummond as a Research Assistant, to work with the Clinic team on this project which will complete in November 2015.

Our Associate Director, Dr Gráinne McKeever, has also been awarded research funding by the British

Academy to examine the participative experiences of court litigants. This year Gráinne has published research on decision-making in social security law and given a series of conference presentations throughout the UK on access to justice and social security.

We are also delighted to have appointed Dr John McCord to a Lectureship in Law with particular emphasis on the development of the LLM and Clinic. John's research interests span a range of social justice issues, including housing and children's rights, and he has a particular expertise in empirical legal research. John and Gráinne are currently working with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to research the impact of litigants in person on the Northern Ireland court system.

We have given written and oral evidence to the Department of Justice consultation on the Access to Justice Review 2, based on the clinic model of access to justice which features in the Agenda document for the Review. Dr Orla Drummond gave evidence based on her award-winning research into the participation barriers for users of special educational needs tribunals. Orla was awarded her PhD in May 2015 and PhD research continues to play an important role in the Clinic's work. This year saw the publication of peer-reviewed research by PhD student Mark Simpson (on the devolution of social security) and by our PhD graduate Dr Deborah Magill (on employment disputes).



*Dr John McCord joins the LLM Clinical Legal Education team as a Lecturer in Law*



*Dr Orla Drummond who has been appointed to develop our research on university law clinics*



# Students

Our students are of the highest quality, and have taken full advantage of the special features of the LLM, from shadowing tribunal representatives, to expanding their placement work, to social activities that have provided them with new networks for the future.

The quality of student casework has continued to impress us, and to impress clients and tribunal chairs. Under-pining academic work has also been excellent, and this year has seen the publication of LLM student coursework in national student journals.

As we hoped, the future career paths for students look promising. This year we have LLM Clinical Legal Education students and graduates taking up paid internships with the Law Society; pursuing access to justice related PhD projects; and securing apprentice solicitor positions, with their LLM Clinical Legal Education experience seen as directly relevant by their respective employers.

The benefits of the programme are perhaps best explained by one of our students who graduated, with distinction, in 2014:

*“ The LLM Clinical Legal Education blends insight into legal practice with the opportunity to explore some of the methods and demands of socio-legal research.*

*It introduced me to the difficulties facing tribunal users in Northern Ireland and enabled me to reflect on systemic problems I identified while practicing as a trained legal representative under expert supervision. Above all else, I discovered that law students can and do make a real difference to the issues facing our legal system. ”*



Dr Gráinne McKeever and Dr Esther McGuinness with some of our 2013-14 LLM Clinical Legal Education graduates



# Awards and Appointments

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Dr Eugene McNamee who was based in New York as a Fulbright Scholar

The work of Clinic staff has received local, national and international recognition. Dr Gráinne McKeever has been appointed to the UK Social Security Advisory Committee, a non-departmental public body that provides advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and to the Department for Social Development. The Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee, Paul Gray CB, has stated: *"Gráinne will bring valuable expertise to the committee on all social security issues but, in particular, Gráinne will provide an important insight on developments relating to welfare reform in Northern Ireland."*

Dr Eugene McNamee, Head of the Law School, received the US-UK Fulbright Public Sector Award 2014. Eugene's award was based at Fordham Law School, New York from September 2014 - January 2015, giving him a unique opportunity to review the work of Fordham's 15 different law clinics and to travel throughout North America to develop insight into best practice and legal innovation for Northern Ireland.

The Clinic was shortlisted for a global Innovating Justice award by the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law. We were the only Law School in the UK and Ireland to be nominated for this global award and our nomination placed us alongside justice innovations from across the world. Clinic Director Ciarán White took part in a three day Innovating Justice Forum at The Hague to develop the access to justice potential of the Clinic.

The exceptional quality of our teaching has, once again, been recognised. Our Associate Director, Dr Esther McGuinness, was shortlisted for the highly prestigious Law Teacher of the Year award, a national competition sponsored by Oxford University Press. Esther was nominated by both undergraduate and post-graduate law students, one of whom stated: *"I doubt Esther could have done more to influence, motivate and inspire us to share her enthusiasm."* In addition, the Ulster University Law Clinic team was awarded the University's Distinguished Teaching Fellowship Team Award 2014, for leading teaching innovation through the LLM Clinical Legal Education.



The LLM Clinical Legal Education team which was awarded the Distinguished Teaching Fellowship Team Award 2014



# Events

Clinic staff and students are keen to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and we have hosted and participated in a series of events this year. We began by hosting a visit from the Justice Minister, David Ford MLA, who talked to Clinic staff, students and graduates about the Clinic's casework and the focus of the LLM Clinical Legal Education on access to justice and unmet legal need. The Minister commended the University for the excellent service that it is providing. The Access to Justice Review 2 team also visited the Clinic and expressed enthusiasm about the clinic model of access to justice, and about the legal innovations that are being developed by Law School staff.

In April 2015 we hosted our annual roundtable on Public Interest Litigation, led by Clinic Director Ciarán White, with speakers from the Children's Law Centre, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission, the PILS Project and the School of Law at Queen's University Belfast. Ciarán also contributed to Law Centre NI's roundtable on strategic litigation in June 2015. Dr Gráinne McKeever took part in the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's roundtable on social security and child poverty, and gave a presentation on the user journey through the redress maze at the conference launch of the report on Mapping the Administrative Justice Landscape in Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Ombudsman.

This year saw our PhD student Ciara Fitzpatrick join three of our undergraduate law students in a Street Law workshop, run by the Law Society of Ireland, led by Professor Rick Roe from Georgetown Law School, Washington, and Sean Arthurs from Harvard Law School. Ciara and Dr Deborah Magill then ran our annual Street Law seminars at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. 36 undergraduate law students took part, delivering interactive presentations on different aspects of law to young people at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. The presentations were facilitated by Louise Ormsby at Woodlands JJC who also gave students a guided tour of the Centre as part of their Street Law programme.

We are delighted to have been able to continue our links with Fordham Law School, and hosted a dinner for Fordham staff and students who take part in Fordham's annual summer internship programme in Ireland. The event gave our LLM Clinical Legal Education students a chance to compare clinical experiences with those of Fordham students and to host a visit to the Clinic for Fordham interns based at the Office of the Lord Chief Justice. We also hosted a visit by Professor Michael Schwartz, Director of the Disability Rights Clinic in the Office of Clinical Legal Education at the Syracuse University College of Law and hope to develop this clinical connection in future years.



Justice Minister David Ford MLA with Conor McCormick, the recipient of the inaugural Access to Justice Scholarship



Ulster's undergraduate law students taking part in the Street Law workshop



# Looking to the Future



Dr Gráinne McKeever joins Jane Townsend, Partner and Head of Allen & Overy's Legal Services Centre in Belfast, at the launch of new scholarships that will improve access to justice in Northern Ireland

The next academic year brings a new partnership with global law firm Allen and Overy which has sponsored a generous package of scholarships for LLM Clinical Legal Education students for the next three years. Jane Townsend, Partner and Head of A&O's Legal Services Centre in Belfast, said *"We've been greatly impressed by the LLM Clinical Legal Education programme's unique approach to developing students' research and clinical capacity in social justice, as well as growing this capacity within the academic and voluntary sectors. We are pleased to provide a three-year commitment to the programme and look forward to presenting the scholarships in due course."* The Allen and Overy scholarships will support the next generation of social justice lawyers at a critical time for access to justice across the UK and further afield.

The Department of Justice has once again provided a full fees Access to Justice Scholarship, continuing its support for students into 2015-16. The 2014-15 Scholarship was awarded to Joan Davison, who says: *"Without the Access to Justice Scholarship I would have been unable to take part in this unique and exciting course. Not only has it provided me with a wealth of practical experience, it has also been instrumental in paving the way for the next step in my career as a trainee solicitor."*

We are also looking ahead to our Access to Justice conference in November 2015 that we will be co-hosting with Law Centre NI. The conference will launch the findings of our research into the role of university law clinics in delivering access to justice and is timed to coincide with the Department of Justice response to the Access to Justice Review 2. Confirmed speakers include Colin Stutt, author of the Access to Justice Review 2, Professor Pascoe Pleasance, University College London, and Matthew Smerdon, Legal Education Foundation. The conference will be free to attend and invitations will be circulated when the programme has been finalised.

The work of LLM Clinical Legal Education staff and students continues to play an important role in progressing legal education as an access to justice innovation and developing our understanding of how to meet unmet legal need. We are grateful for all the support that we have received from so many people and organisations and look forward to continuing those relationships well into the future.

Further information is available at:

**[ulster.ac.uk/lawclinic](http://ulster.ac.uk/lawclinic)**  
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**[@UlsterLawClinic](https://twitter.com/UlsterLawClinic)**