

From Courtroom to Classroom: How Therapeutic Jurisprudence is Reshaping Health Law Education

By Professor Nicola Glover-Thomas

In June 2025, the University of Manchester became a centre for a growing legal movement, hosting a two-day conference on Therapeutic Jurisprudence (TJ). This project aimed to transform high-level research into practical curriculum changes for our students.

Here is a look at the rationale, outputs, and impact of connecting Law and Psychology.

Rationale: Why Therapeutic Jurisprudence?

The healthcare and legal systems face unprecedented pressure. Rising health disparities, complex court decisions, and inequalities based on age, race, and socio-economic status require a new approach.

The primary goal of this project was to explore how the legal system can act as a ‘therapeutic agent.’ Instead of viewing the law as a cold, neutral force, Therapeutic Jurisprudence looks at how legal processes affect the emotional and psychological well-being of people involved.

We wanted to identify the unintentional harms caused by legal processes and move beyond rigid interpretations of law to a more complete understanding. Importantly, we aimed to ensure that this modern and compassionate approach was not just discussed in conference halls but actively taught to the next generation of lawyers and healthcare leaders.

Project Output and Curriculum Delivery

The project helped produced two key outputs: an international conference and the creation of new teaching resources.

1. The Conference Organised by Professor Nicola Glover-Thomas (Law) under the auspices of the International Society for Therapeutic Jurisprudence UK Chapter, the event brought together established academics, including Dr. Jaime Lindsey (Reading University) and Dr. Anna Kawalek (Leeds Beckett University). We hosted global experts including Professor Amy Campbell (University of Illinois Chicago), Dr. Nigel Stobbs (Queensland University of Technology), and Dr. John Stannard OBE (Queen’s, Belfast) who explored everything from maternity services to cognitive decline in older adults.

2. Curriculum Development To ensure these insights reached our students, I successfully secured £400 from the SoSS Diversifying the Curriculum Fund. This funding was key in bringing our academic discussions to life.

It allowed us to hire Suzanne Farg, a PhD student in Law, who helped synthesise the conference findings. Together, we transformed complex academic papers into new undergraduate lecture materials and case studies.

These materials will be integrated into the syllabus for the undergraduate module, Medicine, Patients and the Law. Instead of abstract legal tests, students will engage with diverse, real-world case studies - ranging from Approved Mental Health Professionals facing regulatory challenges to the holistic legal practices promoted by practitioners.

Reception and Evaluation

The response to the initiative has been very positive. Delegates at the conference described it as enjoyable, insightful, and informative, highlighting the supportive atmosphere.

While the new curriculum materials are just beginning to roll out, feedback from the conference shows students are eager for this content. The focus on the 'life course' - examining vulnerabilities from birth to old age - resonates with students who are more socially aware. By grounding the law in human experience, we find that students engage more deeply with the material.

Navigating Challenges

Turning high-level, interdisciplinary conference papers into accessible undergraduate teaching material is challenging. One issue we faced was balancing the complex theories of Therapeutic Jurisprudence with the practical needs and expectations of a law degree.

It takes time and care to distil complex psychological and sociological ideas into legal case studies without losing essential details. Additionally, discussing sensitive topics like trauma-informed care and mental health inequalities requires a thoughtful approach to ensure the classroom remains a safe space for learning.

Next Steps

The next step is to fully implement these materials in the upcoming academic year, along with student feedback surveys to assess their impact on understanding health law more broadly.

The conference has established a clear agenda: the law should serve as a tool for healing. By incorporating these principles into our teaching, we ensure that Manchester graduates enter the professional world equipped not only with legal knowledge but also with the holistic mindset needed for the future of health and social care.