



## Guidance Notes for Students

### The Gráinne O'Neill Memorial Legal Essay Competition 2025-26

Dear TY Student,

The Law Society of Ireland is delighted to invite you to participate in the Gráinne O'Neill Memorial Legal Essay Competition in memory of the late Judge Gráinne O'Neill, Athlone. Gráinne was the youngest judge in Ireland to be appointed in 2014. Gráinne died in 2018 following a period of illness but during her life and especially during her years as a judge, Gráinne worked diligently to apply the law in a fair, rigorous and compassionate manner. She reflected greatly on all matters to do with the law and on best ways to build a fair, just society. She was courageous, creative and deeply committed to doing good work and work of a high standard.

We hope that the legal essay competition will enable you to explore the essay title in a way that will help you be courageous, creative and innovative in your thinking and writing. The judges will be looking especially at freshness of approach and your approach will be unique and different from another student's approach. We hope that you enjoy the process also and that you will feel a great sense of achievement when you submit your essay. For the overall winners, we have three cash prizes also and a special Memorial Trophy and medal. The trophy will remain with the prizewinning school for a period of one year.

Here is some guidance to help you submit a good essay:

**For the 2025/26 school year, the title of the Gráinne O'Neill Memorial Legal Essay Competition is: 'Protecting Voices, Preventing Harm: Legal Challenges in Online Freedom of Speech.'**

- Step 1: Think carefully what this title means to you. Jot down your early thoughts. If something else comes to mind over the next few days, keep writing down your thoughts. They will be invaluable to you. Keep thinking all the time.
- Step 2: Start your research work by searching for any legislation (i.e. laws in Ireland or Articles in the Constitution of Ireland), legal cases (in Ireland or beyond), publications or literature (e.g. books, articles, blogs), websites or media coverage relevant to the topic. Think about your school life and daily life – are there any policies or procedures, regulations or laws that you might be able to draw on to help you as you write your essay? Keep writing down your ideas. As you are searching, researching and reflecting, write down notes and your reflections on what you are learning and discovering.

- Step 3: You might have an opportunity to have a discussion with your TY Coordinator and class on the topic. You will get an opportunity to share, listen and learn from each other. Others' ideas could provide you with new ideas and new avenues to explore in your research. Help other students in your TY class. It is good to talk with your teachers and your TY year students.
- Step 4: Start structuring your essay. Here is some important guidance to help you.

### Guidance on the Rules:

- The essay must not exceed 1,500 words excluding any footnotes and listing of references.
- The essay can be submitted in English or Irish.
- The essay must be typed out and presented well. The essay must have the following 4 main paragraph headings: **Introduction, Development, Conclusion, Reflection**. You can have as many other sub-headings as you wish or no sub-headings at all. The choice is yours.
- The Introduction should set out how you are going to approach the essay and how it will be set out (the signposts for the reader) and the sources that you will use to help you in your writing. You should mention also the importance of your own reflection throughout and the significance of your own learning.
- The Development part of the essay will give you a chance to develop the key ideas and points that you want to develop in your essay. This is where you will draw on your research sources e.g. laws, articles, legal cases, to support the points that you are trying to make. We want to hear your own voice, your views and your perspectives coming through strongly in the essay. It is your essay. As you write, keep asking yourself: How is the point I am making helping me to address the essay title? The word limit is tight so be sure to stay focused as best you can.
- The Conclusion part of the essay will provide you with an opportunity to draw together your key points and refer back to the essay title so that you can tie up the Conclusion with what you set out to do in the Introduction. This will help you also to have a strong, logical, coherence in your essay.
- The final paragraph heading is called Reflection. It is your own personal reflection on what you learned from doing the essay e.g. how it has helped you in your learning as a TY student and in your day-to-day life and in thinking about the future. Here are some prompt questions to help you write your reflection: How did you feel as you went about your research and writing? Did you enjoy it? What part/s did you enjoy most? Did the researching/writing/reflecting challenge you in any way and if so, how? What part/s challenged you most and how did you overcome those challenges? Did writing the essay make you think differently about something or think for the first time about something important that you discovered in your research and whilst writing? Did the essay get you thinking about a career in law or in writing or other creative area? Be sure to bring your own self into the writing of the essay and the final paragraph is your own personal reflection on your essay journey. Think of a strong final sentence or a question that is meaningful to you and to addressing the essay title. Be creative and courageous!
- Here are the broad categories that the adjudicators will use to mark the essays:
  - Knowledge and understanding of the topic (30 marks)

- Analysis and arguments presented (30 marks)
  - Structure of the essay, research evidence, referencing, language (20 marks)
  - Overall coherence of the essay, readability, and impact (20 marks)
- The submission date for all essays progressing to the county finals is **5pm on 21 November 2024.**
  - It is very important that you proof-read your essay a few times before you submit it. Check your spelling, grammar and that your sentences reflect a good standard of written English or Irish and good punctuation e.g. capital letters, full stops. Make sure that you have your paragraph headings set out clearly to signpost the reader. Remember you need at least four key headings: Introduction, Development, Conclusion, Reflection. You can have as many sub-headings as you want to if you desire sub-headings to help you write a good essay and reflect your best efforts.
  - The final page of your essay (use a blank final page) should contain a list of references (sources of evidence) that you used to help you write a good essay e.g. list of legislation, list of books, websites consulted etc. We hope the pointers for legal sources that we have given you will help you.
  - When you submit your essay, please include the Declaration form. The Declaration confirms that your essay is your own work. It also provides us with your contact details.
  - You may not submit any written work generated by an AI program as your own.
  - Essays must be typed and submitted electronically to the email address provided by your school.
  - Prize-winners will be notified through their school and will enjoy a special prize-giving ceremony.

### **Where to look for Legal Sources? Pointers to help you**

- Legislation: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/>
- The Constitution of Ireland: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons.html>
- Legal Cases: <https://www.bailii.org/>
- The Law Reform Commission: <https://www.lawreform.ie/>
- Oireachtas Debates: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/>
- The Courts Service: <https://www.courts.ie/>

### **Importance of participating**

We emphasise the importance of doing your best and whilst not everyone can be a prize-winner, everyone can be a participating student in the essay competition and enjoy a great sense of achievement on submission. We look forward very much to reading your essay. Thank you very much for participating in this lovely competition for TY students.

Good luck and enjoy!

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