

Rachael Irvine



Project(s): The Mental Element in Homicide and Damages for Personal Injury.

Previous experience: I have an academic background in law and psychology, complemented by practical experience within Scotland's criminal justice system. I graduated with an LLB from the University of Glasgow in 2019, which included a year abroad in Reykjavik, Iceland, and later completed an MSc in Psychological Studies at the University of Aberdeen. To bridge my legal and psychological studies, I focused on courses in social and forensic psychology. My research also explored whether impressions of defendants influence jury decision-making in Scottish criminal trials and was awarded a prize by the School of Psychology.

In addition to my academic work, I have held roles within the Scottish Courts & Tribunals Service and the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, supporting the delivery of justice in Scotland. This combination of interdisciplinary study and frontline legal experience underpins my contribution to the Commission's work in law reform and policy development.

Future plans: Looking ahead, I am exploring opportunities that combine my interests in criminal law and forensic psychology. While I am uncertain about the exact path I will take after my term at the Commission, I am keen to build on my interdisciplinary background and pursue further specialisation in areas where law and psychology intersect – particularly in the context of international justice.

Can you tell us about a recent piece of work?

Following the publication of the Commission's Report on Damages for Personal Injury in December 2024, my recent work has focused exclusively on the Mental Element in Homicide project. A key contribution I made was preparing an impact assessment, which evaluated the potential costs, benefits, and practical implications of our proposed reforms to the law of homicide in Scotland. This work offered a valuable opportunity to consider the broader societal and legal impact of the reforms, and the assessment will be published alongside the final report in autumn 2025.

Why would you recommend being a legal assistant?

Being a legal assistant at the Scottish Law Commission offers an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the development of Scotland's laws as a young professional. The role provides hands-on experience in both legal and policy work, allowing you to see how reform ideas are shaped, challenged, and refined. It is an excellent environment for developing critical thinking skills, especially in weighing the legal, social, and practical implications of proposed reforms.

Personally, I have been able to explore an area of long-standing interest – criminal law – while also gaining insight into new fields, such as damages. Often, even when a project does not initially seem to align with your existing interests, you may be surprised by how engaging and rewarding it turns out to be. There is always something thought-provoking to discover in every project.

What's the best thing about being a legal assistant?

One of the best things about being a legal assistant at the Scottish Law Commission is the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with highly experienced legal professionals. I have been fortunate to work in project teams led by Lady Paton, a Senator of the College of Justice. The role also offers the chance to contribute beyond core project work – for example, I helped to produce a public-facing video highlighting the Commission's work. Being part of a small, expert team means your input is genuinely valued, and you gain insight not only into the substance of law reform but also into how that work is communicated to the wider public.