

TEACHER'S NOTE: DEFINITION OF THE LAW

1. DEFINITION

The law consists of rules of conduct in a community, imposed by an authority, which demand or prohibit certain actions and are enforced by the imposition of penalties.

2. CRIMINAL LAW

Criminal law concerns an individual's relationship with the State and society as a whole. Its purpose is to deter people whose behaviour is thought to be a danger to themselves, others or to the community in general.

Criminal law provides a set of rules which regulates people's behaviour and activities.

Punishments/penalties are handed down by a criminal court - (District, Circuit, Central Criminal, Special Criminal and Court of Appeal). They can include fines (the most common penalty) and/or prison sentences.

The accused person is prosecuted by the State represented by:

An Garda Síochána for most minor offences

or

The Chief Prosecution Solicitor (in Dublin) or State Solicitors (outside Dublin) who generally deal with offences that are more serious including those that require a jury

Examples of criminal offences:

- murder
- manslaughter
- armed robbery
- reckless driving
- driving without insurance
- shoplifting
- assault

3. CIVIL LAW

Civil law mainly concerns a person's relationship with other people or groups of people. It can also involve the State e.g. Army deafness cases.

Most civil matters never need to go to court. However, when disputes cannot be settled privately, or where circumstances require it, these matters are dealt with by the civil courts (District, Circuit, High and the Supreme Court)

Examples of civil law:

- compensation law such as personal injury or defamation
- family law
- employment law
- conveyancing and property law
- contract law
- licensing - such as dance, publican and lottery licences