

## I sought the law...

During our week's work experience with the *Law Society Gazette*, much of our journalistic training entailed covering elements of the Law Society's Transition Year (TY) Programme. These expert-led discussions and practical workshops provided insight into the work of solicitors, barristers, and the courts. TY trainees dissected real-life court cases, took part in moot (mock) court sessions, and visited some of Ireland's largest law firms. Finally, they got first-hand experience of the 'hard edge' of criminal law by sitting in on some real-life trials at the Criminal Courts of Justice. This was TY training on 'Turbo'. Report by Zakia Laassri and Katie Whelan (Dominican College Wicklow)

*Tuesday 7 February 2017*

Solicitor and CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, Noeline Blackwell, spoke about the development of human rights and how this field of law has progressed. We were quite surprised to discover that religion had been the genesis of law and legal matters, by encouraging a moral code among followers, for example: "Thou shall not kill" from the Ten Commandments. This proved to be one of the most interesting talks of the week, as the human rights topic really appealed to us and our TY peers, opening up new areas of knowledge to us.

After lunch, a panel of lawyers dealt with the topics of studying law, how to become a solicitor, and legal career paths. They spoke to us about their fields of law and how they came to choose them. Rachael Hession (solicitor and Law Society course manager) explained the steps required to qualify as a solicitor and the exams we would have to take. Before embarking on a legal career, trainee solicitors Ammi Burke, Daniel Pelu, and Carol O'Shea advised us to be fully certain that law was for us, given the length of the qualification process!



Patricia Harvey (barrister) explained the essential differences between the roles of solicitor and barrister. The traditions that new barristers must complete to be called to the Bar

fascinated us. For instance, a trainee barrister (or pupil) must complete ten dinings in the King's Inns. The purpose of these dinings is so that fellow pupils can socialise with each other, as well as with senior counsel. We learned about barristers' mode of dress, particularly their wigs – which are made from horse hair – and costing in the region of €700 each. Thankfully, the wig is no longer mandatory.

The day concluded with a practical session, intriguingly titled 'Dead Bodies – Live Minds'. This exercise in solving a murder was presented by John Lunney (a solicitor at the Law Society's Diploma Centre). A real-life case was presented to us, which followed the murder trial of an American woman, Christine Morton.

Our task was to discover whether Christine's husband Michael should be found guilty of the murder. This was an interactive task, which involved us working in groups and reading the evidence found at the scene. Due to the (biased) evidence presented, it seemed crystal clear that the accused had, indeed, murdered his wife. We found out later that Michael had been convicted of the murder and sentenced to life in prison.

The Innocence Project (TIP), an organisation that works to have certain cases re-opened by using DNA testing to overturn original convictions, succeeded in its efforts with this case – though Michael had already served 27 years of his sentence by this time. TIP discovered significant anomalies in how the original case had been presented – certain crucial evidence had not been presented in the court during the original trial. The original conviction was overturned and he was subsequently released. The TY students found this task a most challenging and enjoyable one, as it encouraged us to work through the various elements of an extremely complex case. It showed us that, sometimes, court judgments can be wrong.



*Wednesday 8 February 2017*

'What does a solicitor do?' was the theme of a panel discussion by a number of solicitors who shared their experiences of life as a solicitor. Each spoke about the pros and cons from their perspective. Similar to our Tuesday talk with their barrister counterpart, the solicitors spoke about their college experiences, why they chose their preferred field of law, and the opportunities available on qualification.

There was much discussion about the differences between working for small and large firms. Small firms were regarded as being more personal and 'close', while larger firms were viewed as being more structured. Brian Malone (partner, Ennis & Associates) spoke about working life in a litigation practice in Dublin, while Law Society Council member Justine Carty (Gartlan Furey) presented the perspectives of both city and provincial firms. She warned that being a lawyer was not quite the glamorous image portrayed on TV. Niamh Gavin (Data Protection and Privacy Counsel, Facebook) optimistically noted, however, that "through bust and boom, there are always opportunities in this area".



#### *Thursday 9 February 2017*

Early Thursday morning, we went off-site to visit the Criminal Courts of Justice. Here we got a real feel for the workings of the criminal courts. We sat in on two very different cases – one a 'for mention' case; the other a drunk/drugs-driving case. These showed the less glamorous side of a lawyer's day-to-day life, but also demonstrated how heavily clients rely on their solicitors and barristers in the courtroom setting.

Later that day, we were treated to tours of some of Ireland's most prestigious law firms – Arthur Cox, Mason Hayes Curran and McCann Fitzgerald. This revealed the more structured side of legal practice. At Arthur Cox, we learned about their Zambia Project and how much they have helped the suburban communities there. This corporate and social responsibility project started in 2008 with ten trainees taking part and is now regarded as a 'coming-of-age' for trainees, with 30 to 40 travelling to assist the programme each year.

#### *Friday 10 February 2017*

Due to fulfilling other *Gazette* requirements on Friday, we could only attend one talk that day – on EU Law by Eva Massa (solicitor at the Law Society's Diploma Centre). Ms Massa spoke about the EU's legal protections for its citizens and the various legislative schemes the EU is involved in. One of the more interesting things we learned was that EU citizens who are involved in accidents in another EU country are entitled to free health care.

Other workshops that day included 'Social Media and the Law' (presented by Katie Nolan, associate at Mason Hayes & Curran); 'Children and the Law' (by Dr Geoffrey Shannon, solicitor and State Rapporteur on Child Protection) and 'Employment Law' (by Rory O'Boyle, solicitor at the Law Society's Diploma Centre). The interactive module that day, 'Mini Mock Trial Preparation and Trials', proved to be one of the highlights for the TY students.



Overall, the TY Programme was a fantastic experience, which we would whole-heartedly recommend to anyone thinking about a career in law. Its breadth, depth and hands-on approach provided a wonderful overview of the work done by lawyers and the courts, and gave us a great insight to the importance of the law in our daily lives.

The final question: 'Journalism or law?' To paraphrase a famous song title: *'I sought the law... and the law won!'*

We wish to thank Mark McDermott (editor) for his training, guidance and the opportunity to be 'journalists for a week' at the *Law Society Gazette*; and to John Lunney (Education Centre) for allowing us to participate as observers during the Law Society TY's Programme.