

RECIPROCAL POLICE AND STUDENT ADVOCACY TRAINING: Two Exciting Initiatives for the New Style LPC at the Plymouth Law School

Lori Evans

The Legal Practice Course has always looked to ways to forge links with local practitioners and the wider legal fraternity beyond. So it was with delight that Lori Evans, lecturer in law on the LPC responded to an email from Dennis Husband, a training officer with Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, based at Middlemoor Police Headquarters.

Dennis explained that he had been asked to deliver additional training in giving evidence at court to trainee and experienced police officers throughout the South West. He decided the best way to do this was to organise a 'mock court' and he approached retired Judge William Taylor to preside. Honiton Magistrates' Court kindly agreed to provide a venue for half the training sessions so looking for somewhere with the appropriate ambiance and status Dennis approached Seale Hayne. With a Judge and two venues in place advocates were next on Dennis' list.

Dennis made contact with the Crown Prosecution Service and they agreed to help but with so many police officers to train more advocates were required. That is when Dennis hit on the idea of making contact with the University of Plymouth. On the one hand he had police officers that required court training and on the other students training to be a solicitor keen to gain experience in advocacy; a marriage indeed made in heaven.

The LPC students responded well to the challenge and the opportunity to cross examine police officers. Dennis attended the University of Plymouth to explain how the staged arrest scenes that he had recorded with the help of head cams would work in the mock court setting. The police officers would watch the arrest video and then make notes in their pocket notebook as if they were the arresting officer. The notebooks would then be photocopied and given to the students and used as the basis of their preparation for either evidence in chief or cross examination.

Tony Randall, Senior Prosecutor from the CPS was invaluable and worked together with the students to give them the benefit of his many years' experience. With everyone prepared and Dennis as Usher, Judge Taylor sitting and the LPC students looking every bit the solicitor advocate, the mock court was in session. Anyone walking into the 'courtroom' would have been forgiven for believing that they had stumbled into the middle of a trial. It was the gravitas that naturally made the learning for all concerned so keen. Students and police officers alike could grow accustomed to the stress of the courtroom scenario within the confines of a safe environment. The forum offered the students the chance to put into practice their substantive criminal law knowledge and the skill of advocacy, which flows only from thorough preparation and experience.

Criminal and civil law and practice make up the compulsory litigation course that students are required to pass as part of the Post Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice, stages 1 and 2, as offered by the University of Plymouth. As far as we are aware no other LPC provider offers this kind of unique advocacy experience and the University of Plymouth and the LPC are very grateful to Devon and Cornwall Constabulary for inviting us to participate in this exciting venture. I know that the students gained so much experience and confidence as a direct result of this partnership and I would like to thank Judge William Taylor, Tony Randall and naturally Dennis Husband for all their hard work to make this possible'.

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary provided each participating student with a letter of thanks confirming their involvement, a valuable addition to any CV for a student looking for a training contract. The training of police officers in this area continues and it is anticipated that the current intake of LPC students will also be able to take advantage of this initiative.

As part of our new style LPC each student will have the opportunity to experience first hand law in practice with a new work placement initiative being rolled out this November. Course Director Maggie Hemsworth said, 'I have been delighted with the response from local practitioners who have not hesitated to offer to host an LPC student, in some cases more than one. Firms from as far afield as Truro in Cornwall to a Magistrates' court in Somerset have offered their valuable time and expertise. I know that the students will gain so much from this. I hope too that it assists firms in their recruitment processes.' The work placement scheme commenced on the 16

and 23 November 2009 but will be offered to students in the next academic year and any firm that may wish to participate should e mail lori.evans@plymouth.ac.uk