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FACULTY OF  
**ARTS, HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES**



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**A creative,  
collaborative and  
cross school  
approach to  
delivering teaching  
on professional  
degree programmes**

**Karen Winter and  
Aine Maxwell from  
SSESW and IPLS**

**Both professionally  
qualified (social  
worker and solicitor)  
and both senior  
lecturers**



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# Context

- Two degree programmes – UG social work (either 2 or 3 years) and PG course for trainee barristers
- Run by different Schools – SSESW and IPLS
- Both offer professional qualifications
- On graduating both work in court settings – social workers are involved in making applications to courts regarding children at risk/or who have experienced harm and barristers represent children, parents and Trusts.



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# Context

- Historically, no provision for both to learn together
- Concerns emerging from the Judiciary: poor quality of written/oral evidence presented by social workers; lack of knowledge of courts and its expectations.
- Concerns emerging from social workers: feeling ill-equipped; lacking confidence in their role and the authority invested in their role
- Desire to create space to learn together whilst respecting the role of the other



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5<sup>th</sup> Annual Report (COAC, 2005:38) - importance of interdisciplinary education in underpinning the successful operation of the family justice system in NI was highlighted.

**‘It is only by an exchange of views, a sharing of mutual experiences and a realisation of the problems facing the disparate branches of the family justice system that we can all benefit from our shared experience.’**

Lord Justice Thorpe:

**‘The delivery of a high quality service to all those who enter the family justice system, whether as applicants or as respondents, must depend on informed collaboration’.**

# QUB Education Strategy

- Employability
- Opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching and learning



# Court work skills – learning outcomes

<b>Trainee Barristers</b>	<b>Social work students</b>
<b>Understanding of SW role in child protection cases</b>	<b>Understanding of the role of the barrister in child protection proceedings</b>
<b>Analyse the significance and effect of an expert's report</b>	<b>Analyse case materials and write a report</b>
<b>Elicit favourable evidence to construct examination in chief to advance own case and undermine opponent's case</b>	<b>Present accurate, analytical written evidence for courts on the basis of the exercise of professional judgement</b>
<b>Undertake clear and coherent examination in chief and cross examination</b>	<b>Present clear, confident and concise oral evidence</b>

# Course outline –SW students

- SW students receive case material based on real life but anonymised people/events. Includes: details of child abuse; parental issues; harm leading to removal of child
- SW students analyse risks and develop a care plan regarding child's future living arrangements and plan of work with parents
- Plans include rehabilitation, care within extended family, long term care outside of family
- Emphasis is on use of professional judgement, critical analysis and assessment
- Using tools and templates available in daily social work practice they produce a court report

# Course outline – trainee barristers

- Each Bar Trainee allocated 5 social work student reports
- Bar Trainees analyse reports, prepare cross examination
- Both groups receive training in court work skills
- Both groups come together for a day. Trainee barristers cross examine social work trainees as expert witnesses in front of a fully qualified Barrister tutor
- Delivered in groups of 15 to enhance opportunities for peer learning
- Barrister tutor gives immediate review to both the Bar Trainee and the Social Work student

# Benefits

- Trainee barristers gain access to real life examples of child abuse, parenting concerns and challenges developing plans for children
- Social workers gain access to techniques, methods of cross examination, expectations regarding written and oral evidence and an opportunity to learn how to manage feelings of anxiety
- Both groups have access to detailed feedback from fully qualified barristers with years of professional experience

# Benefits

- Not formally assessed. Student feedback - fear and anxiety impacted on ability to fully engage, freedom to make mistakes and openness to learn from mistakes
- As deliverers of this learning opportunity, we come with our own professional expertise – fully qualified solicitor and fully qualified social worker
- We work closely with stakeholders and understand the needs of employers

# Feedback - trainee barristers

‘The course provided an invaluable opportunity to practice the necessary and unique skills required in cross examination of an expert witness; specifically a social worker. This has proved beneficial in practice where witness handling of experts is a regular occurrence. It is rare to be afforded an opportunity to practice cross examining a skilled individual in a safe learning environment whereby constructive criticism is given by other experts and their peers.’

Barrister at Law practising in Family Law

# Feedback – social workers

‘Non-pressure evoking practical element very helpful for learning due to the ability to learn at a different level and good for full engagement with the learning experience’

‘the experience of participating in the workshops with the trainee barristers was a really valuable learning opportunity’

‘the experience at the IPLS was excellent’

# Feedback from stakeholders

## Benefits for bar trainees

- They have, for the first time in their training, the opportunity to read and forensically analyse a Social Work report. In my view, this is excellent preparation for the early stage of their careers when it is likely that instructions will be received late in the day
- As the training is observed by teaching staff from both the Institute and the School of Social Work and the students themselves, the trainees receive the benefit of feedback from everyone involved



# Feedback from stakeholders

## Benefits for social work students

They receive first-hand experience of being cross-examined by a trainee Barrister. This provides them with insight into the purpose of the questions being asked and whether they are shortcomings in their report. Following the exercise, I have found that the Bar Trainees will tell the Social Worker their “case strategy” and this is invaluable for the Social Work Students

# Stakeholder views on employability skills

- SW students learning the value of mastery of their evidence and material
- SW students given practical and applied experience and guidance in addressing the court, defending their evidence, and dealing effectively with questions designed to challenge their conclusions and professional opinions
- Barrister trainees having the opportunity to put their advocacy training into practical (simulated) use, and are required to assimilate material and formulate questions in a restricted time-frame, which reflects conditions in practice

# Stakeholder views on employability skills

- Both trainee barristers and SW students learn to deal with points/matters which they may not have previously considered when preparing pre-exercise, including interventions from the court (reflecting the 'real world' of court room work)
- The social workers see the direct influence which their reports and professional conclusions/opinions have on the ultimate decision-maker (thus enhancing professional confidence and ownership of the authority invested in their role)

# Thank You

Have you any questions?