

**Application for a Teaching Award in the Rising Stars category  
Dr Ciara Hackett, School of Law**

**1. PREVIOUS TEACHING AWARDS (200 words maximum)**

*If you have ever previously won a Queen's Teaching Award, please note the year and category (eg Rising Star, Team etc) below. You should also provide a short explanation of how the work outlined in this application differs from the work for which you were previously recognised.*

**NA**

**2. CONTEXT FOR THE APPLICATION (300 words maximum)**

*Please provide a brief summary of your application and a context for your work.*

*Examples of the information you might include are; the subject you teach or the area of learning support you work in, the type of learning and teaching/learning support activities you are involved in, how many learners are involved, your particular learning and teaching/learning support interests and an outline of your overall teaching/learning support philosophy?*

I am half way through my third year of teaching at Queen's University Belfast. I teach on a range of subjects to both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students –core and optional modules. Some of these include; Introduction to Torts (200 students (UG) 50 (PG)); Contemporary Issues in the Law of Obligations (150 students (UG)), Issues in Corporate Governance (15 students, (PG)), Issues in Business and Human Rights (10 students); International Corporate Social Responsibility (25 students).

With a wide range of subjects, student numbers and levels of study, my teaching philosophy is centred round the ability to teach something that cannot be found in a book. Teaching should inspire learning. It needs to be creative, to have that shock value, to be memorable (Shore, 1986). A good teaching experience is something that stays with a student for years. My philosophy has been and continues to be, committed to critical thinking. By intertwining this into every class, students are assisted in their journey of learning and discovery. Not all students will have 1:1 degrees, and progress to exceptional legal careers. This does not mean that their learning process should be undermined or deemed lesser than others.

Not only a voyage of discovery as mentioned above, learning is also a journey of self-development and fun. Students should view learning as showcasing what they can do as opposed to fearing what they have not yet mastered. If the learning process is considered engaging, students are more open to furthering the learning experience. This is facilitated in my lectures with (for example) excerpts from social media to situate law within popular culture. This is particularly useful to engage with students who, certainly initially, tend to find the Latin terminology and legal terms quite daunting. Using more relatable examples allows for networking and facilitates class bonding.

**2. DISCUSSION**

*You should illustrate your discussion throughout with reference to specific learning and teaching activities/learning support activities. You should also provide examples of the influence of learner feedback on your learning and teaching/learning support practice.*

**(a) Promoting and enhancing the learners' experience (1000 words maximum)**

***How you stimulate and inspire learners***

*"I am a notetaker taking notes for students in this module but I have enjoyed the lectures so much that I wanted to give some positive feedback – the lectures were excellent"* (Notetaker, Torts, 2014)

Learning is part of the university experience. Students coming to university tend to be nervous – wondering whether they will be able to cope with the reading, changes in assessment and, the independent study. In my modules, I attempt to show students that law exists outside dusty textbooks and instead use various mediums of learning to stimulate and inspire. One of the undergraduate modules that I teach, is a core module entitled "Introduction to Tort Law". In this module, I have used excerpts from social media – rapping about trespass to "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air", drawing on "The Inbetweeners" for the evolution of assault– allowing Sheldon from the "Big Bang Theory" to describe the Chain of Causation, focussing on "Friends" for Product Liability and Ricky Gervais' infamous Golden Globes speech, which served as a smorgasbord for discussion on Defamation. When students can relate to the medium, they are more willing to engage (Harris, 2006). This was noted in the feedback: "It was always put into context e.g. news stories and TV show examples. It was incredibly well organised and easy to understand" (Torts, 2013-2014)

To provide students with a guide to their progress, I have used some very informal revision sessions – table quizzes and my take on "8 out of 10 cats". This assists with learning but has the added bonus of encouraging networking within the classroom. For formative feedback sessions, I introduced "peer feedback". Students were given a problem question to complete and bring to class where they swapped the paper with a colleague. Then they were provided with the conceptual marking scale, the answer and asked to mark their colleague's paper. This has helped remove the fear from assessment. In this same session – I provided the students with four answers. The students were then asked to rank these in order (1:1; 2:1; 2:2, Pass) and then situate them on the conceptual marking scale. The students found this a very valuable experience as it helped them to see how marks were awarded.

Also in this formative feedback session we looked at provision of feedback. I am an advocate of "traffic light feedback" both for students and myself. To get students used to giving and receiving feedback we used traffic light feedback in the session. This helped them deal with key issues quickly allowing their feedback to "progress" in the same way as their work later in the term.

Finally, last year I introduced "the weekly update". This is an email that is sent out to all students at the end of each week. It is broken into four parts: 1) summary of the lecture 2) A run down of questions and answers received over email and discussion forum 3) an update on what resources have been uploaded on QOL and 4) any other business – this could be a link to a recent case decision, work on skills etc.

### ***How you develop, present and organise resources***

*"Love the interactive aspect of the lecturer's style, prezis was a nice change from linear PowerPoint"* (Tort, 2013-2014)

*"The correlation of clips and pictures on prezis really helped to keep the information retained (sic). The emails (sic) at the end of each week going through a summary of what we learnt that week was so good"* (Contemporary Issues in the Law of Obligations, 2014)

Visual aids are imperative to students, and to me! I had always used PowerPoint but found that I was over-relying on it and students were more focussed on taking notes than actually learning. I moved towards Prezi, which offers plenty of scope for creativity - supplementing my presentation as opposed to *being* my

presentation. My Prezi along with readings, cases and worksheets (with prompts for critical thinking) are always uploaded at least one week before class.

**How you assess learners appropriately**

*“Ciara’s lectures are the best I have had at Queens, she makes them as interesting and relevant as possible and highlights that elusive exam technique of critical thinking, which I have found very useful” (Contemporary Issues in Obligations 2014)*

Race (2008) has written extensively on assessment and suggests that it is the most important thing that we do. Taking this point still further, Rust (2007) suggests that assessment can have either a negative or positive impact on student’s university experience. I coordinate ‘Contemporary Issues in the Law of Obligations’. When I took over this module in 2012-2013, the assessment was an essay. Students performed fine, but many submissions were derivative and not that interesting. Reflecting on this, I proposed to the teaching team that we change the assessment from essay to journal article. My rationale for this was that students have been writing essays for a number of years prior to starting university. They do not feel that they have anything to learn. By requiring students to write a journal article, which would reward creativity, I hoped to see the standard and marks rise accordingly. I knew this would be a challenge for students and that the “fear of the unknown” factor would worry them. So, each week, I provided for an optional assessment on each of the component parts of an article:

- Writing an abstract
- Writing an introduction
- Critical reading
- Critical writing
- Citation
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

Students received additional support from the Learning Development Service and the Library. Most students took the opportunity to receive feedback on one or more area. The quality of the work (final assessment) was fantastic with no two articles on the exact same topic. With more than half the students obtained a 1:1, a class average of 69%, and no fails, the external examiner noted that: “[i]t seems clear that the students have engaged very well with the subject and many have produced very good work.”

**(b) Supporting colleagues and influencing support for student/and or staff learning (maximum 350 words)**

Since commencing my employment at Queen’s University, I have been an avid supporter of Peer Observation of teaching noting its value as a “reciprocal exercise with staff observing each other, sharing insights and providing mutual support” (Bell, 2005). A number of early career staff within the School of Law have also taken part in more informal peer evaluations in addition to the more standard exchanges. Extremely useful for both an observer and an observee, these prompted me to change the way I present formative feedback sessions, as well as encouraging members of staff to rethink their approach in certain areas to build on the staff member’s core strengths thereby “nurture[ing]...transformative change” (Kohut et al) in a dual – learning environment (Hendry and Oliver, 2012). This, along with my role as LLB Director within the school has enabled me to identify good practice, and participate in workshops and conferences that talk about the value of said practice in teaching and learning. In disseminating good practice, I have presented at the School of Law teaching away day (June 2014) on the use of Prezi and Pyramid teaching schemes (Race, 2008) to encourage critical thinking amongst students.

At an institutional level, I have represented the School of Law at the DE Forum, presenting on methods that I have used to promote critical thought in the classroom (especially round social media). I am the library representative in the school working closely with the law librarian to develop skills and strategies

for student learning. A recent initiative on this is the “Westlaw accreditation training”. Westlaw is a legal database used at an international level to access case law, statutes and various secondary sources. This additional training leads to a further qualification for Level 2 students and provides them with a more comprehensive toolkit for learning support.

I have worked with colleagues from other institutions including the National University of Ireland Galway to promote and disseminate best practice, to look at the importance of student feedback. These experiences have been rewarding and all have richly informed my understanding of the area.

**(c) Ongoing professional development (maximum 350 words)**

I successfully completed my Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in 2012 whilst on a University Fellowship at National University Ireland Galway. This experience taught me to critically reflect on my teaching – from preparation to delivery to feedback, as well as to value student contributions on my teaching and curriculum design. In particular, I have developed the habit of,

- *Reflecting on lectures.* This tends to take the form of making notes post lecture on what did/did not work well with students and what they especially responded to. After a few weeks, I revisit these notes and make an action plan for how to capitalise on what worked and how to rethink the bits that did not appear as successful. Prior to the module starting again, I once again revisit the action plan and put it into action. This creates a cycle of reflection, which has developed my teaching style (and confidence) considerably.
- *Keeping abreast of teaching skills and techniques through Higher Education blogs and articles.* This is especially useful at the start of each semester. I bookmark information relevant to feedback for the end of the semester.
- *Using student feedback to design the course.* This is not always possible in a qualifying law degree but with some subjects, there is flexibility. Where students have responded particularly well to a topic/teaching style, I aim to embed this style/topic further within the curriculum for the module either using the style more frequently or using a “popular” topic for formative feedback exercises which tends to ensure a greater uptake on optional feedback exercises.

In addition, I was a member of the trial e-learning initiative within the School of Law and am currently in the process of implementing some recommendations arising, both within my own modules and at a wider School level. I have also attended a number of courses within the University to expand my knowledge of teaching styles and develop my skills in this area. Two courses particularly useful have been the Questionmark training day and a session entitled “Teaching with Emotional Intelligence”.

Bibliography

Bell, M. 2005. *Peer observation partnerships in higher education*. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc., Milperra, NSW.

Harris, Tasmin., 2006. 'Pedagogies for diversity: retaining critical challenge amidst fears of 'dumbing down'', *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 31, no.5, 521 – 535

Hendry, Graham D. and Oliver, Gary R., 2012. Seeing is Believing: The Benefits of Peer Observation, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, vol. 9, no.1,  
Available at:<http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol9/iss1/7>

Kohut, G F, Burnap, C, & Yan, M G 2007. Peer Observation of Teaching. Perceptions of the Observer and the Observed. *College Teaching*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 19-24

Race, Phil., 2008. *The Lecturer's Toolkit* 3rd Ed. London: Routledge

Rust, Chris., 2007. Towards a scholarship of assessment, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 32, no. 2, 229 – 237

Shore, Ira., 1986. Equality is Excellence: Transforming Teacher Education and the Learning Process, *Harvard Educational Review* vol. 56, no. 4, 406