



Aberystwyth University Innocence Project is part of the Innocence Network UK whose aim is to educate and to overturn and prevent the wrongful conviction of innocent people. The Innocence Project involves two teams of student caseworkers from all year groups who are currently investigating the cases of two clients who claim that they have been wrongfully convicted. Student caseworkers carry out their investigations under the supervision of a member of staff within the Department of Law and Criminology and practising lawyers. Students are trained to work in accordance with INUK Casework Protocol which reflects Professional Codes of Conduct. Students are oriented towards finding fresh evidence and arguments that demonstrate their client's factual innocence, as opposed to identifying irregularities within the investigation and trial process that render their convictions unsafe, regardless of whether or not they actually committed the crime. In so doing, students have the objective of demonstrating to the Criminal Cases Review Commission that should the case be referred to the Court of Appeal, there would be a real possibility that their client's conviction would not be upheld.

As well the public benefit of filling a gap within the appellate system for those who are innocent but are unable to demonstrate either an irregularity that renders their conviction unsafe or 'fresh evidence', which can exclude exculpatory evidence available but unused at trial, the Innocence Project is just one example of the continuing importance placed on 'clinical legal education' within the Department of Law and Criminology at Aberystwyth University. What this means for students is that they have practical 'hands on' experience working on real criminal cases under the supervision of practising lawyers. Student caseworkers also have the opportunity to meet and learn from a network of victims of wrongful convictions, academics, undergraduates and practitioners at conferences organized on a regular basis.

The Innocence Project thus serves to enhance learning and teaching within the Department of Law and Criminology by creating the type of learning environment in which students can gain a real and practical insight into the substantive, practical and ethical issues that traditional book learning or even simulation cannot provide. Students involved in the Innocence Project work on their assigned case for approximately 4 – 6 hours per week for the duration of their undergraduate degree scheme. By investigating real criminal cases, students deepen their knowledge and understanding of the limitations of the criminal justice system and develop a range of attributes needed across a range of careers. For example, students receive extra training on case management, effective communication, research and investigation, adherence to professional and ethical codes of practice, team work and using case management software. Students are also encouraged to reflect on and improve their performance.

Experience so far indicates that the Innocence Project fosters curiosity, lateral-thinking, problem solving, collaborative learning as well as a healthy scepticism about the criminal justice system. The Innocence Project also goes some way to tackling one of the

challenges that students face after graduation whereby practical experience is needed to get a job, yet a job is needed to get practical experience.

Further Information

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