

My story is one of an exciting career in law without ever working in a traditional legal environment (solicitors' firm or as a barrister), entirely sparked by a period abroad as a Hubbard scholar.

Having completed a Law degree at Oxford, and then articles in a firm of solicitors in London, I noticed the announcement in the Gazette of the Hubbard scholarship fund that would enable young lawyers to study law abroad. I applied saying I wished to see how the common law criminal and code based civil law systems operated in the province of Québec. Owing to a Canadian postal strike I was unable to organise a suitable study course before leaving, so arrived in Montreal and contacted the law department at McGill University. Saying that I wanted to see the legal system in action, I was encouraged to contact a community legal clinic that had just been started with the backing of the department in a poor bilingual district of the city. I worked in this pioneering community-based clinic as a legal volunteer for nine months studying the legal problems presented by clients, and the governance, values, strategy and culture that held the organisation together – against, it must be said, some formidable challenges. Recently re-reading the report I wrote for Hubbard trustees on my experience, I am impressed by how much the clinic was able to achieve.

My time in Montreal completely changed the course of my career. I was able to observe first hand how, by offering high quality, specialised and targeted advice and support, the grant-funded clinic was able to meet, in an extremely effective and affordable way, the legal needs of individuals and groups in a deprived community. As such, it seemed to me to compare very favourably with our own Legal Aid scheme that simply paid private lawyers case by case; and to offer a potentially exciting and fulfilling way to practise as a lawyer.

Therefore, when I returned from Canada, I was determined to get involved in the emerging “socio-legal” sector. As one of the only people in England who had law centre experience, I was appointed to be the inaugural Director of the Camden Community Law Centre in London, the first publicly funded such centre in the UK. There we supported clients mainly with housing, social security, employment and criminal law problems, and also running an innovative 24 hour on call duty solicitor scheme – offering for free, the kind of legal help that local solicitors didn't provide. Policy-makers in government took considerable interest in our model of legal service provision.

I then felt motivated to teach law students the kind of law we had practised in the law centre (but no one had ever taught me), and obtained a lectureship at Brunel University to teach a course I devised in Welfare Law. While there, as a result of the government contacts, I was appointed to serve on the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure which examined the rights of suspects and of the police in the investigation of crime. The result was the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the nation-wide duty solicitor scheme. Following this exposure to high level policy making, I developed a career in legal journalism and broadcasting, which led to me

being appointed to run the Law Society's communications and public policy departments, forging connections with parliamentarians, consumer bodies and other regulators. This led to my appointment as Insurance Ombudsman, and then to be the first Financial Ombudsman. These ombudsman roles combined a semi-judicial function with a high level policy role in the financial services regulatory scheme. It also demonstrated how justice could be delivered cheaply and effectively to consumers outside the court-modelled adversarial system.

Now having finished working full-time, I continue my life-long interest in finding better ways in which to provide access to justice, whether through industry regulation or justice system reform. I am involved in two industries as a regulator – gambling (as a board member of the Gambling Commission), and the press (as chair of IMPRESS, the first UK independent press regulator). I also serve on the board of JUSTICE the justice reform think-tank. And I am the proposed class representative in the first nationwide UK collective class action, seeking £19 billion in compensation for UK consumers for wrong-doing by MasterCard.

Had it not been for my experience in Montreal, I might have never have discovered how Law outside orthodox legal client practice can be exciting, adventurous, and stimulating! Thanks to the Hubbard scholarship for broadening my horizons and opening the way for the exciting professional life in law I have been privileged to enjoy.

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