

Event proposal 2018:

Levelling the playing field?

Dogmatisms and pragmatisms in human rights practice

Everyone has the right to legal representation. And yet some clients have far more resources at their disposal than others. For some human rights lawyers, accepting instructions from the powerful (government, police, or perhaps wealthy private clients) would at best be seen as losing specialist focus, or at worst risk becoming a 'sell-out' to the 'dark side'. To others the idea of only ever representing vulnerable claimants can seem like the road to tub-thumping self-righteousness.

Students and practitioners alike could benefit from a frank exploration of what motivates some lawyers (and firms and chambers) to develop an approach which is largely 'one-way', and others one that is more 'in the round'. Are the former just irritating 'social justice warriors'? Are the latter just detached legalists who are anaemically apolitical? And what are the practical benefits or shortcomings of each approach?

Alongside other events where our focus is on a particular area of law, this is an example of an alternative approach, stepping back to look at the broad sweep of human rights practice in the UK. As such, it could appeal in particular to those who are new to the HRLA, or those we will invite who are wondering whether they should join us.

The format of the event could be a 'trialogue', with a leading practitioner representing each approach, and perhaps an experienced judge as moderator. I will not put forward specific names at this point, but the YLC together should be able to establish a good target list of ideal contenders.

We could approach the University of Law in Bloomsbury with a view to hosting the event in their main lecture theatre. It is an accessible, comfortable, and modern facility, and partnering with ULaw (and/or other course providers) could help us to attract new interest from among the student body.

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