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Reflections on the 'Reimagining Advocacy' Workshop

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Reflections on the 'Reimagining Advocacy' Workshop

On 14 May 2026 the CEPLER Senior Lead for Advocacy, Dr Audrey Cook (author of this report), hosted a Reimagining Advocacy Workshop with the aim of exploring the evolving landscape of advocacy in legal education. The workshop, which was supported by Birmingham Law School's Centre for Employability, Professional Legal Education and Research (CEPLER), facilitated a discussion on challenges, innovation and the sharing of best practice ideas about effective advocacy teaching against the backdrop of future directions in legal education, in both curricular/co-curricular and undergraduate/postgraduate settings.

The Workshop brought together legal academics and practitioners to present papers on topics which considered advocacy teaching from a range of different perspectives:

1. **Dr Larysa Zhdankina, University of Glasgow**: *When law stops being an exercise: teaching advocacy in conditions of turbulence - lessons from wartime legal education for Law Schools everywhere*
2. **Dr Audrey Cook, University of Birmingham**: *Advocacy beyond the courtroom: introducing civic advocacy to law students*
3. **John Dove, barrister at Charterhouse Chambers and founder of Advocacy Club (now part of the Legal Skills Academy)**: *Advocacy Club: boosting student confidence and enhancing advocacy skills*
4. **Professor Gianna Bouchard and Dr Mary S O'Hanlon, University of Birmingham**: *Enhancing vocational preparedness: drama-based learning to build confidence, manage performance anxiety, and support vocational learning in Law and Medicine students*
5. **Theresa Lynch, University of Birmingham**: *A critical reflection of a mooting module: illuminating class and power relations, and the function of language*
6. **Nigel Booth, University of Law**: *"The Skills of Modern Advocacy", a forthcoming book by Jaime Hamilton KC & Nigel Booth: Designing Coherence in Advocacy Education, a Case-Led Model for Skills Progression*

This report consists of two parts. Part (A) shares the author's reflections on the event and considers future outputs that may follow from it. Part (B) contains the abstracts of the papers delivered during the workshop.

(A) REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE OUTPUTS

The Workshop was well attended by a variety of internal and external guests. External guests included both those working HE and those practising in the legal sector (or holding a legal role in another sector), who were keen to hear about new perspectives on advocacy teaching. Also in attendance were some prospective students looking to enrol at the University of Birmingham in the near future. The event confirmed Birmingham Law School's status as a progressive institution that invests in advocacy education through CEPLER and within the core curriculum, and is keen to share best practice with others in HE and those who hold an educational role in the bridge between HE and legal practice.

Reasons for organising the event

In the introduction to the Workshop, the author noted that academic conferences seem to have few speakers on the topic of advocacy, despite there being plenty of innovative advocacy teaching in existence and every law school teaching it on a curricular or co-curricular basis. Therefore, it was an opportune time to organise an occasion for educators and advocates to come together to share experiences, ideas and best practice approaches to teaching advocacy.

Not discussed on the day were possible reasons for the underrepresentation of advocacy speakers in higher education dialogues. One possible reason is that advocacy teaching in undergraduate academic settings is assumed to be limited to traditional and fairly static courtroom advocacy/mooting or debating activities which pave a way to legal practice, which limits pedagogical interest in new or noteworthy aspects of advocacy teaching. At a recent Association of Law Teachers conference the author was thanked for giving a paper on advocacy by a senior delegate, who explained that when they had tried to disseminate advocacy teaching in the past they were discouraged on the basis that there was little new to say and it only related to future barristers or solicitors, which was not the focus of law schools that favour teaching law as an academic, as opposed to vocational, discipline.

Another reason may be that a significant proportion of advocacy teaching takes place on post-graduate vocational training courses for aspirational barristers/solicitors, delivered by specialist providers. Those courses tend to adopt a largely uniform curriculum in order to teach content determined by the regulators (Solicitors Regulation Authority/Bar Standards Board). Therefore, the courses can be very similar wherever they are delivered in the jurisdiction, leaving limited scope for educators to design their own programmes and then disseminate good practice through academic dialogue. At the same time, many of the vocational training courses are delivered through private HE institutions that operate teaching contracts that differ significantly to traditional HE institutions and the latter's research-informed culture of scholarship and dissemination alongside teaching delivery. This means that staff teaching Solicitors Qualifying Examination and Bar Practice Course courses, are less likely to participate in pedagogical dialogues through conferences or journal publications. They must all have a background in legal practice as a pre-requisite to teach, whilst a background in academic scholarship activities is neither required nor a feature of their role. Finally, those institutions teach and examine all year round with less of a traditional academic year structure, leaving little to no time for scholarship activities (the author has direct experience of both types of HE settings).

Sharing best practice and new perspectives

A deliberate feature of the day was to invite speakers from different education and practice backgrounds so they could compare and discuss their experiences of teaching advocacy. As a result, traditional HE educators could learn about what teaching early career barristers/solicitors involves from those engaged in that activity and vice-versa, whilst those of a law background could learn about the benefits of drama-based advocacy teaching from Professor Gianna Bouchard and Dr Mary S O'Hanlon. The most moving paper was delivered by Dr Larysa Zhdankina on the experience of war time advocacy teaching, and how the classroom became a place of sanctuary and belonging for students.

Speakers and guests made positive comments on how the day had expanded their understanding of advocacy from being limited to courtroom exercises to a much broader definition, which included, for example, the civic advocacy activities discussed in the paper presented by the author. A guest made the observation that there was an overlap between advocacy and some pro bono activities, such as working with Third Sector organisations to raise awareness of particular rights or a given legal issue, or civic engagement through advocacy in the form of public legal education. Those in attendance who were involved with pro bono activities agreed.

Another idea that resonated with the room was the role played by emotion in advocacy teaching. This was part of the author's reflections on her civic advocacy paper, and it caught the interest of the sixth form students present at the session who were keen to understand how emotion could be positively acknowledged in their future education, when it is traditionally regarded as being unsuited in the study and practice of law. For too long "emotion" has been conflated with being "[over]emotional" when they are two different things. Without emotion, our reasons for doing anything would lack purpose, and likewise our students' motivations for studying law and using their voice to speak on behalf of others risk being overlooked or dismissed. The requirement to adopt an objective perspective is not at odds with acknowledging the subjective position of any party and how their interests or rights are purposefully protected through the law.

Looking Ahead

There are a number of potential future outputs which may follow from the Workshop.

One already confirmed is that Theresa Lynch and the author have been invited to speak on the Queen Mary Reimagine Law Podcast - School of Law later in the year, focussing on what

students can expect if they engage in advocacy activities at university, the different forms that a legal career can take, and the importance of advocacy as a transferable skill for legal careers and beyond.

Another possibility is for the author to submit a proposal to The Law Teacher for an edited collection of short articles by those who came to speak on the day, which at the time of writing (July 2026) is in progress.

(B) ABSTRACTS

Below are abstracts summarising the papers delivered by the speakers during the workshop:

1. **Dr Larysa Zhdankina, University of Glasgow**: *When law stops being an exercise: teaching advocacy in conditions of turbulence - lessons from wartime legal education for Law Schools everywhere*

How does legal education change when classrooms are replaced by shelters, and advocacy becomes an act of survival? Drawing on the experience of teaching law in wartime Ukraine, this session explores how persuasion, trust, and ethical resilience redefine advocacy as both a professional and human skill.

Persuasion begins in childhood in every attempt to be heard, understood, and believed. In law, this instinct becomes a disciplined craft: advocacy, the professional ability to combine reasoning, empathy, and trust to influence thought and action. Even outside of business, every lawyer becomes a strategist in communication - a professional who must grasp the client's needs, shape a convincing offer, and guide others through complex decisions. Advocacy is therefore not a single skill but an integrated competence linking persuasion, critical thinking, and professional success.

In times of war, this connection becomes immediate and real. Teaching law during the war in Ukraine has turned advocacy from simulation into survival. Amid displacement, fear, and institutional collapse, persuasion shifts from performance to protection and from winning arguments to restoring trust and emotional safety. Under fire, the lawyer's voice itself becomes an act of advocacy: to reassure, to comfort, to lead.

Such conditions reveal persuasion's true formula: arguments, trust and emotional safety. They show that to teach advocacy under turbulence is to educate resilient, ethically grounded communicators who understand responsibility as deeply as they understand law. The lessons

born in these extreme classrooms reach far beyond Ukraine. They remind law schools everywhere that when law stops being an exercise, advocacy becomes not only a courtroom skill but a human one, an enduring capacity to turn knowledge into care and conviction into action.

2. **Dr Audrey Cook, University of Birmingham**: *Advocacy beyond the courtroom: introducing civic advocacy to law students*

This paper discusses pedagogical reflections on two workshops which introduce civic advocacy to law students. They were created following student requests for opportunities to learn about advocacy in the context of alternative careers. Civic advocacy is related to the pedagogy of 'service learning,' which has a long history in the US and features in many HE disciplines including law, philanthropy and public affairs, and is now being adopted in the UK.

The workshops focus on how advocacy skills are transferable to a range of careers. In the introductory workshop, students are presented with examples of high-profile advocates for different causes and some worked examples of civic advocacy, followed by two exercises. Exercise 1 involves how to turn a fact into a persuasive statement. Exercise 2 invites students to present a short speech or a letter to their MP to argue for a policy or law change, or to raise awareness of an issue.

The later guest practitioner workshop is delivered by a solicitor-advocate from the Crown Prosecution Service who also holds a founding role in a philanthropic organisation. The session includes two group exercises. "Build a campaign" involves students thinking about the problem they are trying to solve, the resources needed and the best advocacy method to use. "The Decision Makers' Table" allocates different stakeholder roles to members of the group, who are then instructed to negotiate an agreed compromise position on a policy statement.

There are two observations. Firstly, students value advocacy as a transferable skill in the context of both legal and alternative careers, which aligns with scholars who argue that legal education should be a forum where activism is encouraged, and the role of lawyers can expand to assist communities in finding their own voices. Secondly, emotion plays an important role in advocacy teaching. As legal educators, not only can we provide opportunities for students to learn about areas they have strong feelings on, but also use emotion as part of a pedagogical strategy to foster empathy and critical engagement with advocacy subject matter.

3. **John Dove, barrister at Charterhouse Chambers and founder of Advocacy Club (now part of the Legal Skills Academy)**: *Advocacy Club: boosting student confidence and enhancing advocacy skills*

This paper discusses how John has supported thousands of junior and aspiring lawyers in developing their advocacy skills through the Advocacy Club, part of the Speed Mooting Legal Skills Academy. The club offers a supportive, low-pressure environment that removes common barriers such as extensive research and drafting, allowing participants to focus on core advocacy skills.

A key feature of the programme is its peer-to-peer feedback model, enabling collaborative learning, confidence-building, and continuous improvement. This inclusive approach allows individuals of all levels to progress at their own pace.

The session also highlights the range of advocacy training offered throughout the year, including speed mooting, submissions, and trial advocacy, helping participants become well-rounded advocates. In addition to technical skills, the programme develops essential transferable abilities such as public speaking and debating.

Overall, the talk demonstrates how the Advocacy Club equips aspiring lawyers with the confidence, competence, and practical experience needed to succeed.

4. **Professor Gianna Bouchard and Dr Mary S O'Hanlon, University of Birmingham**: *Enhancing vocational preparedness: drama-based learning to build confidence, manage performance anxiety, and support vocational learning in Law and Medicine students*

This presentation focuses on outlining a small, funded project undertaken at the University of Birmingham, bringing together expertise from Law, Medicine, Drama, and the Centre for Performance Wellbeing to design a series of workshops using drama-based techniques to help Law and Medical students deal with forms of performance anxiety. The project aims to help students build confidence, manage performance anxiety, and develop key professional communication skills so they can navigate performance-intensive situations such as OSCE's and advocacy assessments.

Students participate in three experiential, structured workshops that offer a practical approach to addressing these challenges, led by drama practitioners, to enhance both vocational readiness and overall professional development. In this presentation, the speakers reflect on the workshops and the student evaluations to determine their success and onward utility, including the creation of some bitesize films capturing some of the key strategies.

5. **Theresa Lynch, University of Birmingham**: *A critical reflection of a mooting module: illuminating class and power relations, and the function of language*

This paper introduces and reflects on, the design and implementation of an Advocacy (Mooting) module, and includes an overview of the speaker's research project based on the module. It outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the research, emphasising the themes of class, power and language.

6. **Nigel Booth, University of Law**: *"The Skills of Modern Advocacy", a forthcoming book by Jaime Hamilton KC & Nigel Booth: Designing Coherence in Advocacy Education, a Case-Led Model for Skills Progression*

Advocacy is commonly taught as a set of discrete professional skills: for example, examination-in-chief, cross-examination, expert questioning, and submissions. Bar training courses are highly effective at teaching each skill of advocacy by reference to mock case documents drawn up specifically to focus attention on that skill area. Could more be done to show students how to understand the relationship between individual skills, professional judgment, and the evolving demands of a single case?

This presentation considers the pedagogical value of a case-led approach to advocacy teaching, structured around a sustained fictional case and a three-stage skills progression: fundamentals, how-to demonstrations, and advanced technique. Rather than treating these stages as linear or self-contained, the staged case-led model enables students to revisit each level repeatedly as the same factual problem unfolds. Fundamentals acquire meaning through application; demonstrations are tested against changing evidential constraints; advanced techniques emerge as responses to strategic challenges rather than as abstract refinements.

The approach aligns with research on scaffolded and spiral learning in professional education. It also reflects the realities of practice where advocates will engage many of the different skillsets in the same case. Sustained and staged engagement with a single case is presented as a practical way to help students integrate skills, strategy, and case understanding into a transferable model of professional advocacy.