

The Public Prosecution Service

Abstract: Jacki Sleator outlines the origins of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and how the organisation made its transition from a small organisation to one of the biggest legal departments in N Ireland.

Keywords: government; information services; Northern Ireland

Background: The PPS

The PPS was established in 2005, as an outcome of the Criminal Justice Review of 2000. One of its recommendations was for an independent public prosecution service responsible for all prosecutions. The Justice (NI) Act 2002 provided the necessary legislative framework for the creation of the new service. However, the library had begun its incarnation many years previously, when the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland had been established by the Prosecution of Offences (NI) Order 1972.

In those days the legal staff complement was around 40 lawyers, whose main responsibility was for the prosecution of more serious and complex summary cases in the Magistrates' Court, as well as the briefing of counsel in the Crown Court. The police were responsible for the prosecution of minor offences in the Magistrates' Court. The library consisted of first one, then two rooms, crammed almost to the ceiling in the Royal Courts of Justice and was staffed by an Assistant Librarian and an Administrative Assistant.

In 2004, the DPP then moved to a new building adjacent to the RCJ, leased by the Bar Library to the DPP, in preparation for its transition to the PPS in 2005 and the handling of **all** prosecutions. However, the accommodation necessary for its new role was significantly underestimated in many respects, including adequate space for the library. It was allocated one room in the new building and as a result a considerable portion of the collection had to be re-located or discarded.

The PPS Library

The PPS currently employs 189 lawyers and has its headquarters in Belfast Chambers with five regional offices or chambers, throughout Northern Ireland. These offices are based in Lisburn, Newry, Londonderry, Omagh and Ballymena. The library's primary role is to provide a legal information service for the Director and legal staff.

Resources

Staffing

Despite the fact that the number of lawyers has almost quadrupled in the intervening years, between 1972–2011, the staffing for the new library service remains almost the same – comprising one Librarian and one administrative assistant.

Collection

The library collection is small and niche, being concerned primarily with criminal law for practitioners, in its broadest sense. The library uses the Moy's classification scheme for its book stock.

Although the main library is based in Belfast Chambers, each regional office has a mini-library collection of key reference material. Library staff visit the regional offices on a regular basis to ensure that lawyers do not feel disadvantaged simply by being physically remote from the main library. Access to a bespoke online catalogue is via the intranet.

Legislation

There has been a substantial increase in criminal justice legislation in recent years which has significantly increased demands upon staff. Much of the hard copy legislation has been replaced by online sources but good use is still made of the printed copy. For example most frequently in cases of historic sexual abuse, there is a need to determine the law at a specific point in time. Generally it is impossible to access online *versions* of older NI legislation and quite often not even the original text. All of the main UK legal publishers still only provide limited access to NI legislation, if at all. As a result the library by necessity refers to the original hard copy form, the official site www.legislation.gov.uk and the CD 'All the Law of NI' by Barry Valentine.

There is also quite frequently a need to review Westminster legislation debates, particularly for older legislation, in order to determine what was envisaged in the wording and meaning of the Bill en route to statute.

Databases

The library currently subscribes to Lexis-Nexis for access to UK and NI case-law, UK legislation and Blackstone online, while the Westlaw UK Crime package provides e-access to Archbold, criminal law journals and law reports. Frequent training in database use is provided for legal staff.

Services

In addition to responding to daily queries on legislation and case-law, the library also delivers a research service for the Director and other legal staff.

It also provides counsel with legislation and authorities upon request. Often this is required during the course of a trial when documents have to be faxed to the relevant court within minutes.

In the past, the library provided a daily press cuttings service for the Director but this work ceased a few months ago, when the PPS developed its own press office. Library press cuttings have since been discarded with the exception of cuttings relating to the Saville Inquiry.

The library is also responsible for the design, layout and maintenance of the legal intranet. Virtually all legal guidance is published on its pages and as Librarian it is part of my role to ensure that guidance is edited, published and distributed.

Alongside this I publish a weekly electronic current awareness service with links to full text where available. All NI judgments from the NI Court Service are catalogued, abstracted and published on the legal pages.

The PPS may have a capsule library but it punches above its weight to fully meet the needs of the new service.

Biography

Jacki Sleator has been Librarian for the PPS since 2002. Prior to this she worked as Assistant Librarian at the NI Assembly Library from 2000. In 1975 she joined the staff at Loughry College as Librarian.

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Checklist

Books You Cannot Afford to be Without!

Abstract: Dunstan Speight, of Berwin Leighton Paisner LLP, gives his recommendations for some essential reference desk titles.

Keywords: law books; legal research

We are all familiar with the key legal textbooks, but the books listed below are my personal recommendations for titles to keep behind the reference desk to make your own research more efficient.

1) Stoakes (Christopher): *All you need to know about the City: who does what and why in London's financial markets*, Longtail Publishing 2011

There are a number of books available explaining how the City works: this is one of the best. Chris Stoakes

has the knack of being able to strip away all the mystique from complex topics such as IPOs or securitisation and explain technical processes and jargon in layman's terms. This provides an easy way to improve one's knowledge of the commercial context in which lawyers operate – a key factor in creating a well respected research service.

A second volume, subtitled "Understand the world's financial markets and why London dominates" picks up on many of the themes in the first volume and explores them in greater depth. It also provides useful overviews of the world's financial centres, explaining how they have