



Keble College, Oxford: Liddon Quad with the Chapel to the right of picture.

KEBLE COURSE BOTH CHALLENGING AND FUN

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Gina Kyriazis of the Pretoria Bar and I were selected by the National Advocacy Training Committee (NATC) to attend the Advanced International Advocacy Course (Keble) run by the South Eastern Circuit Bar Mess Foundation, held at Keble College, Oxford, from 29 August to 3 September 2016.

Keble is the granddaddy of the advocacy training course held at the Wallenberg Centre in Stellenbosch. Keble is, in a sense, Wallenberg writ large: it has more than double the number of participants and trainers.

Advocacy training is like boot camp for your brain. It is hard work, under pressure, on many different advocacy exercises over the course of a week. There are also presentations and demonstrations by experts in various fields of advocacy. And then there are the practical sessions, where all the participants are given an opportunity to put into practice what they have been taught.

Members of the faculty, the trainers, provide insight into difficulties each individual participant may have experienced in the practical presentation. The trainer then explains how to solve the difficulty and provides a practical example. Participants get to watch themselves on video to reinforce the lesson and then get a chance to replay the exercise using the solution proffered.

At Keble, the participants were divided into a criminal stream and a civil stream. Both Gina and I did the civil exercises. The civil exercises took place in the form of a trial and an appeal. The trial centred upon a diversion of work and poaching of staff by a previous employee of the claimant (or plaintiff) company. Each participant had to do an opening statement, undertake examination-in-chief, cross-examination and to present a closing argument. The appeal dealt with the interpretation of a new UK statute. Participants were divided between the appellant and the respondent.

All participants also participated in an exercise relating to the vulnerable witness. The courts in England and Wales have a strict procedure relating to anyone who may in some way be vulnerable, like young offenders, young victims and other youthful witnesses as well as those with a condition that makes it difficult for them to understand questions or to answer them in the best possible way, like those with intellectual deficits, ADHD or emotional disturbances.

I found the vulnerable witness exercise the most interesting. The particular vulnerable witness was a 14-year-old with ADHD. Teenage actors and actresses performed the roles of the witness. It was quite difficult to engage a witness who was constantly moving around, sometimes on the chair, sometimes

on the floor, and who was increasingly distracted by paper cups or, frankly, anything else in the room.

The final exercise was that of the expert witnesses. There were two streams: financial and medical. I chose medical and Gina chose financial. In the medical expert groups, we engaged with medical specialists at the top of their game. The factual situation involved hypoglycaemia, hyperkalaemia and cardiac arrest.

On the last day, a full trial was run. Participants did the trial in pairs, the work divided between them. A feature that I found unusual was that there was very little, if any, examination-in-chief. In England and Wales, witness statements usually serve as evidence-in-chief, with minor scope for clarification later being sought.

Keble College is a typical Oxford college – in places, imposing and, in others, charming: the old buildings and the apple trees, the immaculate lawns and the towering chapel and hall. The College itself certainly contributed to the feeling that we were there to learn.

Every one of the trainers and administrative assistants was gracious, tactful, helpful, dedicated and friendly. Every one of the participants I met was polite, respectful, kind, helpful, dedicated, and serious about why they were there.

The single biggest difference that I noticed between the participants at Wallenberg and those at Keble was the temperature, and not in the sense of the weather. At Wallenberg there was, between everyone from most senior trainers to the most junior assistants, definitely a sense of camaraderie. This camaraderie took a bit longer to develop amongst the participants at Keble, although amongst trainers it was there from the start. I think that the reason for this is two-fold: Firstly, all of the participants were very serious about doing their best at this course and secondly, the British are, by nature, more reserved.

That having been said, my group did eventually warm up to each other. By the formal dinner on the Friday night we got along very well and even ended up carousing at a club in Oxford town until 4 o'clock in the morning. I am proud to say that this did not affect any of my group-mates' performances in the final trial.

Gina and I would like to thank the NATC for the opportunity and the South Eastern Circuit Bar Mess Foundation for hosting the course. [A](#)



Vulnerable witness exercise: Faculty seated and witness under the chair during cross-examination.



Vulnerable witness exercise: Faculty seated and witness walking around during cross-examination.