

Judicial Communications Office

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE TAKES PART IN QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH SIXTH FORM STUDENTS IN DUNGANNON

11 October 2011

The Lord Chief Justice today took part in a question and answer session with 6th form students from two Dungannon schools - The Royal School Dungannon and St Patrick's Academy.

The event, which took place in The Royal School, was focussed on the topic of "Doing Justice according to Law". The Lord Chief Justice discussed what justice means, and gave the students some insight into the role of the judge, which is to do justice according to the law without either imposing his or her own view on what is right. Listing some everyday freedoms which can be taken for granted, from free debate in class to freedom of movement in NI and further afield, the Lord Chief Justice reflected on the rule of law, which enables the public to have those liberties.

The Lord Chief Justice also talked about the constitutional structures which allow people here to enjoy those freedoms, including the important principle of the independence of the judiciary which means that judges must be impartial between the parties, and independent of the influence of the government or any other organisation in society. Beneath this lies the separation of powers between the government, those who make the laws and the judiciary:

"In practice, the separation of powers means, among other things, that members of the government should not try to influence the outcome of cases, or to demand that judges account to them for the decisions they have taken. The opposite restriction is also true. The judiciary should not comment on matters of policy which a properly for the elected institutions."

The students listened keenly as the Lord Chief Justice urged them to be proactive and find out more about the legal profession and different areas of law. He noted that times are hard for the legal profession in Northern Ireland and that many of the old certainties of legal practice are being swept away. Nonetheless, students serious about a legal career could use work placements, court visits and keeping up to date with the newspapers to prepare themselves for what a legal career would involve. The Lord Chief

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Justice encouraged the students to get involved in issues they cared about and to join voluntary organisations dealing with justice issues.

The Lord Chief Justice's speech was followed by a very animated question and answer session. He faced a wide array of questions ranging from human rights to phone hacking to the use of juries in criminal trials.

The event formed part of a flourishing programme of shared events which has seen the two schools working in partnership over the past 2 years as part of the Sharing Education Programme funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and the International Fund for Ireland and administered through Queen's University Belfast. It builds upon a series of projects that the schools have already taken forward together including joint History conferences, outward bound expeditions under the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, an art exhibition in Dungannon and a forthcoming Irish History Conference. The Lord Chief Justice said it was a pleasure to meet the students. He added that at a recent Law Society event he reminded solicitors of the importance of a full and balanced life in creating a rich and thriving community where they work and live. He continued:

"I clearly have no need to say the same thing to you, because this [event] is a perfect picture of what I was trying to convey."

The Lord Chief Justice concluded by wishing all the students the very best in their exams and choice of future career.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Photographs of the event can be obtained from the Lord Chief Justice's Office.

ENDS

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