



Conference Report: The First 100 Years Colloquium 'Celebrating Women in Law and Criminal Justice'

University of Wolverhampton, 10 October 2019

Kay Dunn*

The First 100 Years Colloquium had been organised by Dr Metka Potočnik,¹ with support from Professor Pete Walton², Dr David J Cox³, and all within the Law Research Centre at the University of Wolverhampton. The aim of the Colloquium was to celebrate the centenary of the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919.⁴ This Act for the first time allowed women in the UK to enter the legal profession (among others). The Colloquium was just one in the string of celebratory events which Wolverhampton Law School has organised this year. These included: hosting the First 100 Years Exhibit of Art Works (April 2019);⁵ the West Midlands Doctoral Legal Network PhD Conference (April 2019);⁶ the Student Essay Competition (June 2019); and this Special Issue of the Wolverhampton Law Journal.

Professor Peter Walton opened the Colloquium with a welcome to everyone gathered at Chancellor's Hall. In his welcome, Professor Walton highlighted the importance of the centenary of the 1919 Act and the celebrations that had already taken place within the Law School. With many female students and staff at the Law School, and the increasing visibility of Women in the Law (and Criminal Justice), it is important to celebrate past accomplishments, and the future direction for women in these professions. After the brief welcome, Dr David Cox opened the Colloquium. In the introduction, Dr Cox expressed gratitude to Ms Frances Crook, the Chief Executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform,⁷ who was scheduled to chair the Colloquium's proceedings, but was unfortunately unable to attend for vis maior reasons. With that, the floor was ready for the expert panellists to start the Colloquium: to begin the conversation.

* Kay Dunn is a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Wolverhampton Law School, University of Wolverhampton. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2172-7543.

¹ <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/metka-potocnik/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

² <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/peter-walton/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

³ Reader in Criminal Justice History, University of Wolverhampton: <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/david-cox/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

⁴ Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919.

⁵ Available: <https://first100years.org.uk/about-us/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

⁶ Available: <https://wmldoctoralnetwork.wordpress.com/events/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

⁷ Frances Crook OBE, Panel Member of the Howard League for Penal Reform: <https://howardleague.org/people/frances-crook/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

To start, Dr Karlie Stonard, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Wolverhampton⁸ gave an interesting talk into her research looking into Technology-Assisted Adolescent Domestic Violence and how young adults are being affected by the rise in social media and the accessibility that enables domestic violence in this manner. She highlighted the thoughts and feelings of those within the study and the alarming impact this is having in young adults today, normalising domestic violence in this manner.

Mr Carl Hardwick, the Governor of Her Majesties Prison (HMP) Drake Hall, Eccleshall, Staffordshire,⁹ continued the conversation in the form of a very inspiring talk about the new techniques he and his colleagues are undertaking within Drake Hall prison, Staffordshire. Alongside his team he has revolutionised the environment for female prisoners and is working hard to tackle the issues that bring women into custody, relating this to events women have suffered within their lives; attempting to give a different prison journey to promote rehabilitation. Initially he aims to welcome women into the prison with a gentle touch, creating an environment in which his prisoners can create a community and learn from one another, improving the feeling of self-worth that is so important. The addition of the open unit, where women can gradually be reintroduced to the outside world is a progressive step in revolutionising how prisoners are treated when they leave and the different approach that women in custody require to really change their lives for the positive. The work that his team is doing alongside companies such as Halfords is making a big impact to the lives of women post-incarceration and was really inspiring for all those in attendance.

As the final speaker on the panel, Suzanne Llewellyn, the Deputy Chief Prosecutor with the Crown Prosecution Service ('CPS') for the West Midlands,¹⁰ an *alumna* of the University of Wolverhampton, spoke in detail about the initiatives at the CPS in cases involving prosecutions relevant to women victims. Technology is having a major part to play in protecting women victims within the court system, where video evidence can be taken, or even video calls with victims in different countries. Ms Llewellyn also highlighted that during her time with the CPS, the demographic had changed considerably. CPS at present consists of mostly female workforce. This became of interest to many of the audience members, as illustrated by the many questions in the session, which followed the close of the Colloquium. Specifically, Ms Llewellyn shared her observations on the balance between one's career, against the demands of home life. The concluding thoughts fell on the note, that women must make difficult choices, but a career in the law is a possibility, particularly with organisations such as the CPS.

In questions from the audience it was highlighted that many careers within the legal profession are possible for women; solicitor, barrister, academic, even with the balancing act many must have of rearing children, running households and any other tasks that come along with being a 21st century professional. The area lacking female representation is still within those higher / leadership roles, such as barristers (QCs), or their equivalent in other areas. Although progress has been made, there is still a long way to go.

⁸ Dr Karlie Stonard, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Wolverhampton: <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/karlie-stonard/> (accessed 20 November 2019).

⁹ Carl Hardwick, Governor of Drake Hall Women's Prison, Staffordshire: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/drake-hall-prison> (accessed 20 November 2019).

¹⁰ Suzanne Llewellyn, Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor – West Midlands Crown Court Unit, Crown Prosecution Service for the West Midlands Area incorporating Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia and British Transport Police: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/west-midlands> (accessed 20 November 2019).

The event was hailed as a great success from those in attendance; bringing a greater knowledge of women's roles within the legal and criminal justice professions; the speakers from practice were occupied by questions from the audience long after the official end of the event. The First 100 Years Colloquium was a great step in developing the University's relationship with practitioners in practice, and the general public.