



Extra-Curricular Bar Mock Trial

Abi Dreaning



In September 2022, a group of 'legal eagle' sixth form students began to prepare for our auditions for Banbridge Academy's prestigious Bar Mock Trial team. Our audition consisted of an argumentative speech on a current topic, debating the pros and cons in front of our esteemed Judge Miss McClelland, her advisors (Barristers Severina Kelly and Vikki Singer) and her mighty gavel!! They selected the pupils they believed were best able to embrace the roles of barrister, witness, court clerk, usher and jury.

Practices began at lightning speed, and we were given out roles that we had to embody: a bouncer, a policeman and a nosy neighbour among other roles. Once familiar with the cases, our determined barristers (Abigail Noke, Lauren White, Lara Crothers and Mia Downey) took to the task with ease, preparing their speeches and questions for the witnesses (Nicole McCully, Maeve Magowan, Rose Widdis, Emily Reid, Aaron Millen, Aimee Dawson, Moore McLoughlin and Abi Dreaning) and questions that they would put to the witnesses from the other schools. Whilst our court clerk and usher, Kaitlyn Jess and Julia Herron, began to rehearse their actions and lines.

Everything had to be kept to a tight time limit, which was hard for a lot of

us given how much we love to talk, but nevertheless we prevailed. The witnesses were tasked with memorising the answers to the questions they knew (examination in chief) and create answers to questions that the barristers threw at us (cross examination). Practices took place every Wednesday afternoon and these were essential for us to rehearse as a group and to gain feedback. The first case was a case of "possession with intent to distribute" while the second case investigated the law concerning, "assault causing actual bodily harm". Both were complex cases and required dedication from everyone on the team.

In January we set off on our adventure to the great and mysterious... Belfast. The team rallied together and put up a good fight (not literally as that may not have been a good idea in a courtroom). We presented our cases with our heads held high and voices raised. We competed in three rounds of what seemed like an episode of a Netflix courtroom drama before awaiting the results. Round 1 was against Belfast High School and our defendant was found not guilty and the judge described it as "An impressive performance". In Round 2 we were up against Glenlola Collegiate and again we were defending. The judge praised the preparation and presentation of the case. The final round was against

Coleraine Grammar in a contest which the judge described as the closest that he had seen that day. Three rounds successfully navigated!! Despite not getting through to the final, we all had a blast and the experience we gained performing in a real court room in front of real judges was invaluable.

A special thank you goes out to our very helpful real -life Barristers, Severina Kelly and Vikki Singer, who we could not do Bar Mock Trial without. They gave up their time willingly and shared their expertise and advice with us in preparation for the day along with Miss McClelland. Thank you for graciously putting up with our talking, badly baked cookies and general all-around craic.

I would thoroughly recommend getting involved in Bar Mock Trial for the experience, the skills gained and for a greater understanding of the legal system.

