

FACULTY OF ADVOCATES - ANNUAL STATEMENT ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

It is essential that the public and the legal profession have confidence that all members of Faculty meet necessary standards of advocacy, to present cases effectively on behalf of clients.

The Faculty's Quality Assurance Programme, introduced in 2016, requires members to demonstrate a standard of effective advocacy in an exercise in legal submissions (for example a legal debate or an oral application to the court, called a motion). In this context, effective advocacy means that the advocate has assisted the court to determine the issue before it. This is a basic standard designed to ensure that the advocate is competent. It is judged by reference to assessment criteria for each key skill-set: Case Analysis, Structure, Use of Language, Engaging Decision Maker, Use of Authorities, Presentation and Use of Documents.

Each year the Faculty assesses approximately one fifth of the practising bar. Advocates are called for assessment in order of seniority, starting with the most senior advocates. The assessment of the advocate's advocacy skill consists of an oral advocacy exercise. The advocate may choose one exercise from a list of a general civil, criminal or family exercises, depending on the individual's practice. Each advocate's presentation is video recorded and assessed by a member of a group of senior advocates who have been nominated by the Dean, and trained by the Director of Training & Education and the QA Director. If the advocate's presentation does not meet the required standard, they will undertake a second assessment using a different exercise, and in front of a different assessor who has not been informed of the previous result. Feedback and assistance is available between the first and second assessment. If in the second assessment the required standard is still not met, the advocate is required to undertake the full devil's assessment the following year, prior to recommencing practice.

In 2022, 74 members of Faculty were assessed. In advance of the Programme a virtual workshop was held by the Director of Training & Education to assist with re-enforcement and development of advocacy skills. The workshop was well attended and a recording was made available to members who were unable to attend to watch at a later date. In 2022, one member was judged as not effective on their first assessment. However they were deemed to be effective following their second assessment, having undertaken additional training with the Director of Training & Education or an individual nominated by them.

The operation of the Programme has been the subject of an independent external review by a leading member of the bar of Northern Ireland. Some changes to the operation of the programme were implemented as a result.