



Doing Feminist Legal Work Best Practice Guide 6



DFLW Best Practice Guide 6

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Feminist Team Teaching

Guest Edited by: Victoria Barnes, Ciara Hackett, Bróna McNeil, Louise Rhodes, Paulina Wilson
Series Edited by Maebh Harding and Aoife O'Donoghue

This best practice guide brings together lived experiences from law teachers about the value of collaborative, feminist team teaching, particular on large modules. It is hoped that this teaching tool will be empowering and helpful in sparking conversation about how to manage power dynamics and develop valuable teaching relationships within the academy.

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What is feminist legal work?

Any form of action that ensures that issues of gender are central in legal policy making, legal education and public discussions.

What do we mean by Feminist Team Teaching?

Feminist Team Teaching prioritises equality, support and collaboration amongst teaching colleagues to make university teaching practices more inclusive.



What is Feminist Team Teaching?

Maebh Harding and Aoife O'Donoghue

It is increasingly common, especially on core modules, for teaching in law to be delivered by a teaching team. These are often the most complex modules in the law school with the highest number of students. Most often, they are taught principally through lectures and tutorials. Owing to the numbers of students and the high numbers of contact hours needed, and the administrative load, a single person (or even a few) cannot deliver the module. These are, therefore, usually taught by large teaching teams to ensure the volume of teaching and the administration of the module can be delivered reliably and successfully to high numbers of students. These teams can be large: sometimes consisting of over 10 members of staff, but they can be even larger than this and can include PhD students, graduate teaching assistants and part time staff. A complex teaching team that contains academic staff members, teaching assistants, hourly paid lecturers and PhD students, all with differing priorities and pressures. Optional modules, are often, though not always, smaller and either taught solely by one member of staff or tend to have a smaller teaching team but can nonetheless raise their own issues.

There is much written about students being taught through team-based learning (also known as TBL). But what about us teaching as a team? How do we teach as a team? What should a teaching team do? What is the job of a module convenor or coordinator in this teaching team? The paucity of literature on team teaching is stark in comparison to the day-to-day reality. The absence of reflection on these questions is probably confined to the scholarly literature. There is in probability strong reflection on team teaching. It just happens outside of legal publications. The absence of written commentary means that best practice is lost or, worse, knowledge is tacit. It only passed on to a select few of insiders.

This *Doing Feminist Legal Work Guide* focusses on disseminating ideas about how to organise a team of law teachers, and what doing it a feminist mode might mean. It considers large teaching teams on core modules, although there are also lessons for those teaching with teams on smaller optional modules. The size of core modules creates challenges, but a team also presents an opportunity for harnessing the benefits that come from size. This includes cross fertilisation as the potential development of a shared set of interests about research and teaching. The benefits, though, are not simply about creating a reliable mechanism for delivering to large numbers. Nor are the advantages just about improving a staff member's knowledge and pushing them on a new or joint intellectual endeavour. As law schools become larger, the social ties among staff as well as our student cohort becomes weaker and less interpersonal. Teaching teams can ameliorate this change. Part of the function of team is in bringing individuals together to achieve one goal, in building those strong social bonds between staff members and giving them a strong sense of companionship, community and belonging. The papers in this collection emphasizes the role of a module convenor as a facilitator for interpersonal growth but also as a leader, who provides for positive social interaction and sense of community.

The Least Among Equals - Enhancing Collegiality in a Teaching Team

Tonbara Mordi

When I became a module leader, I was just a lecturer among a team that included a professor, reader, senior lecturers, and lecturers. Suffice it to say it was a team of interesting characters. The team's varied experience levels and ranks presented an interesting mix of perspectives and strengths. Despite the disparity in experience and rank, I was determined to foster a spirit of collegiality within our team. My aim was to leverage each colleague's uniqueness and distinctive qualities to strengthen the team. I recognised that for the team to thrive, it was essential to build a cohesive and supportive environment where every member felt valued and included regardless of their position. I began by making small yet significant efforts to engage with my colleagues on a personal level. I initiated casual conversations during breaks and after meetings to build a genuine rapport and better understand their perspectives. I listened attentively to their concerns, particularly those related to teaching loads, research challenges, and administrative duties (although I couldn't resolve their overarching challenges, making small adjustments within the team were helpful. Of course, such adjustments could only be realised through the support of team members). I also learned a lot from suggestions and ideas from team members, which were adopted to enhance the module. These interactions gave me valuable insights into my colleagues' strengths and struggles. Sometimes, during moderation of assessment questions and exam scripts, we would "disagree to agree." Also, colleagues were free to deliver assigned topics and seminars as they wished within the parameters of what was acceptable in the department and university, enhancing diversity within the team. Sometimes, taking the time to engage with colleagues on personal matters beyond work was personally fulfilling. As a team, we supported each other. We could stand in the gap on behalf of any colleague who was unavoidably absent due to circumstances beyond their control.

As I reflect on this journey, now as a senior lecturer, I realise that leadership is not confined to rank or title. It is about bringing people together, fostering a shared sense of purpose, and ensuring that everyone feels valued. My experience has taught me the importance of leading by example and the value of creating spaces where all voices can be heard. I may not have had the same experience or authority as my senior colleagues. Still, I focused on building relationships, promoting inclusiveness, and ensuring every team member felt valued.

The Inside of a Mechanical Watch: Or all the moving parts

Aoife O'Donoghue

There are a lot of moving parts to convening a module. There are also a lot of considerations to be kept in mind. There are the people who are teaching with you. Or of course, you may be teaching alone, which is itself a specific circumstance that needs its own reflection. There are all the varied rules and requirements that your School and University set, and depending on where you are teaching and what, that some professional body may set - and these do not always align. There are also the students who can range from undergraduate to postgraduate, who may come from a single year or across multiple years, they may be just from your School or maybe from a range of departments in the Faculty or University, they will inevitably come from a range of backgrounds and experiences but also perhaps countries and legal traditions. Some maybe working, some may not.

What follows is just a brief overview of some of what I think feminist module convening should look like.

Convening a module then is a bit like the workings of a mechanical watch, amazing when running smoothly, but with the potential that with just one part breaking, it will stop ticking along.

So, what would be the feminist response to this? Well, I would argue, the first is to acknowledge that, and look to feminist module leaders - who may not be feminist researchers, as guides.

The second is that there is a gendered dimension to module convening. The necessity to seem on top of everything all the time, to ensure everyone is happy - staff, students, the University. And with ample evidence demonstrating that student evaluations are often sexist, and particularly so if you have any accent or are not from the dominant culture or race, the requirement to please so that these same evaluations do not impact your career negatively. This can often push you to make choices that are not set requirements or pedagogical based but from a fear of what might be written about you at the end. This is an acknowledgement that everyone needs to make, that burden that female staff carry.

A third form of feminist convening, particularly relevant if you are senior, it to own things when stuff inevitably goes wrong. You are the convenor. Now, this does also mean discussing with the team and/or individual where things are going wrong, in a supportive and forward moving way. This does not mean taking the flack for colleagues not pulling their weight. But it does mean that you do not let the most junior

member of the team sink beneath the waves of student opprobrium, nor let student assumptions or stereotypes lead them to conclude there is fault where there is none. This may mean making this point directly to the students. But being a feminist module convenor includes awkward conversations.

A fourth element, and this is very basic. Share. Share your slides, share your lecture notes and handouts. I am always amazed when I learn that people do not do this. Yes, you've worked on it and yes, it took you time. But did you create it all from scratch or did you in fact look at some textbooks or articles or some module outlines on the internet? Did you maybe think about how you were taught it or a similar module (for good or bad)? We are all always building on other people's work. So, share.

Module convening in a collaborative manner: what does that actually mean and entail?

Séverine Santier

I was recently told that my module convening was a highly collaborative affair. Aside being flattered by this, I asked myself whether I had aimed at being collaborative and supportive. If truth be told, not really and what does that tell me about myself, was that a happy incident, was I lucky? Or unconsciously, did I mean to do it all along but did not realise that I was doing it? Now that a new academic year is looming, and that I am actually thinking about it, what does module convening in a collaborative manner actually mean and entail?

Thinking of the manner in which our jobs as academics have changed over the years, those questions are important, especially given that as university cohorts have grown, so have teaching teams and said teaching teams can change (sometimes radically) from one year to the next. So, what is my approach to module convening? Quite simply, treat others as one would want to be treated. Nicely and politely, that goes without saying but given that teaching teams are highly diverse as they can be comprised of long-established colleagues and newer colleagues, all with different expectations, fears, apprehensions, there is more to

it than simply being polite. Being collaborative first of all means being respectful to all members of the team in all manners of communications, be they face to face or virtually. Then, it also means being inclusive and supportive. That is easier said than done since colleagues have different strengths and weaknesses, different views to teaching, are at different stages of their career. Support will therefore be of a chameleonic nature, based on those individual characteristics but without being patronising either.

The support is also not only based on the individual members, but also has to be supporting the team as a whole. To be inclusive, it is important to recognise and value distinctiveness and differences as long as the core principles of the team are all geared towards the same result: supporting the students to be independent learners, the ultimate goal of any module. That core part of the module must be the driving force of the delivery of the teaching, be it in lectures or tutorials. Some colleagues will prefer to deliver lectures, others will prefer tutorials. Recognising those distinct traits without showing favours is also important. This is what I would call the outwards support: the support that colleagues will need practically, to hone their skills. But there is also another kind of support, another type of inclusiveness, the support to allow your colleagues to grow in themselves, in their own self-belief. To do that, you need to be generous: share and recognise best practice of colleagues but also of yourself, and that is the most difficult: be humble: acknowledge personal failures. But perhaps most importantly, be open-minded and always open to change: when you think you know it all and nothing needs to change, the best way to show that you are still a supportive and collaborative leader is to step aside and pass the baton.

The Value and Challenges of Collaborative Team Teaching for ECRs

Philip Gavin

Team teaching can be a very rewarding process especially for early career academics who get the chance to closely collaborate with both junior and senior colleagues in the faculty. It is often a great way to see how other colleagues approach teaching delivery and strike a balance between teaching and research commitments. For newer modules or for assessment frameworks that go beyond the traditional essay styles, this can also be a great opportunity for bouncing ideas off other colleagues. I really cannot understate the value of another pair of eyes to help anticipate what students might find challenging in the module or in the assessment. In that sense the real value in team teaching is not just in how you can divide and conquer but in what you can get out of the collaboration between colleagues.

Part of the challenge will be in anticipating the workload division across colleagues. The “harder” parts of dividing module delivery can be easier to divide on paper – who teaches which parts of the course and who grades which assessments. The “softer” parts can be harder to anticipate or divide up equitably, ie: engaging or assisting students in office hours or in emails.

From the perspective of an ECR, it is also worth remembering that, particularly with the more traditional core modules on offer, senior academics will often have more experience teaching the full range of topics within a module. Some of the most rewarding opportunities in team teaching for me have involved senior academics being generous with their experience, both in sharing their materials and recalling potential challenges or pitfalls that can arise which are not always obvious for a team member who is new to delivering the course content. However, it is also worth remembering that this can also put senior colleagues in a better position to carve out sections of the course that they would prefer to teach which might leave junior colleagues with a less cohesive parts to cover. It is key to find a good balance overall both in what makes sense for the lectures to divvy up and what makes sense from the students’ perspective to have delivered in separate blocks.

Having a good rapport with colleagues in a team teaching scenario allows you to help give each other a dig out when it’s needed. Everyone is working with different schedules and commitments both professionally and in their personal lives. Keeping that in mind is important for making everyone’s lives easier. Open communication between colleagues is also important for students. It doesn’t take much for students to notice gaps in communication between staff and whether teaching staff aren’t singing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to the module delivery. Obviously, everyone should bring their own experience and style to the module but when cracks start to form in week-to-week delivery, students can understandably feel discouraged.

We also should not underestimate what team teaching can do for sparking collaborative research. Some of the best research relationships I’ve developed have started from teaching opportunities and engagement with colleagues. How someone engages in a module or even in a lecture will often be a good signal for how they engage in their research, not to mention a good indicator of whether you would enjoy getting that research relationship up and running. So, in short, be generous and communicative with your work and remember that team teaching is not only about how you all collaborate with each other but also how you as a team engage with the students.

Feminist Team Teaching

Sarah Hamill

What is meant by team teaching? What is meant by *feminist* team teaching? In one sense, all teaching – particularly at university level – is team teaching. Not just because many modules are co-taught, or because the range of modules students take at law school fit together and teach (or so we hope) different skills at different times, but because feminist pedagogies necessarily see students as partners in the teaching and learning process.

In effect, there are interlocking and overlapping teaching teams in the university context but not all of them are formally recognised as teaching teams. The law school context also adds a complicating factor because of the need for some modules to cover specific knowledge and to be assessed in specific ways. Neither of which are conducive to inclusivity either for students or lecturers.

That the goal of inclusivity and equality is a work in progress is hardly a surprise. But just because there is limited scope to act does not mean there is no scope to act. Thus, it is helpful to reflect on the various forms which teaching teams can take and consider how to adopt a feminist approach to team teaching for these forms.

In the classroom the style of the class – lecture, tutorial, seminar, workshop and so on – may affect the way students see themselves and their learning. There is always scope to unsettle these assumptions and, particularly in large lectures, to foster alternative forms of participation than cold-calling or the Socratic method. In upper-year seminars there may even be scope to allow students to pick the topics they wish to focus on and so actively involve them in the teaching process.

For those tasked with delivering a particular module, there is often a requirement to have a module convenor as a contact person. The need for such a convenor should not preclude a more collaborative approach among teaching teams. Such an approach should also be mindful that the workload of teaching is more than just delivery of classes; it is marking, and it is the general administration of the module. Are the second two equitably distributed? After all, and just as some lecturers can face harsher criticism because of their gender presentation or ethnic background, these same lecturers can end up working harder as some students may feel more comfortable approaching them.

Then there is the sense in which even if we do not teach on the same modules, we are teaching on the same degree courses, sometimes the same degree years. Again, different universities can be more or less cohesive here. But it is worth considering how patterns of assessment fit together, how the skills students are supposed to learn are taught, modelled and assessed.

Perhaps the biggest question which a feminist approach to team teaching needs to ask is how it can avoid or minimise hierarchies and power dynamics which may be imposed by university policies, professional body requirements, career stages and so on. All of which is to say that a feminist approach to team teaching should be reflective and discursive rather than prescriptive.

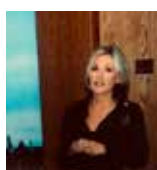
Guest Editors



Dr Victoria Barnes is Reader of Commercial Law. Her research examines contract, commercial and corporate law from transnational, comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives. She unpicks pivotal historic events, such as landmark cases, and places them in context. Her work traces the way organisations, legal principles and doctrines have developed through time. She focusses often on the history of the banking and financial industry and its regulation.



Dr Ciara Hackett is a Reader in the School of Law at QUB. Her research focuses on the intersection between business and human rights. She is particularly interested in how corporations, international and domestic law have shaped the corporate obligation to respect human rights and how, in cases where these obligations have not been fulfilled, a remedy can be sought. Regarding remedy, she researches access to and enforcement of remedy. She is further interested in the corporate form, corporate governance and corporate social responsibility. From a teaching perspective, her contributions cut across Tort, Company, Corporate Governance, CSR and BHR. Beyond, she is interested in lecture material, working in teams, student engagement and unique approaches to assessment. She has recently (August 2024) been appointed the School's SWAN Champion.



Dr. Louise Rhodes is a Lecturer in Law (Education) in the School of Law, and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Dr Rhodes has assumed various leadership roles in the school, including the Masters in Law Programme Director and she is currently the LLB Law with Languages Programme Lead. Louise's core teaching areas are Housing Law and Policy, Administrative Law and Land Law.



Dr Paulina Wilson is a Lecturer at the School of Law at Queen's University Belfast, where she has been Deputy Director of Education and LLB Programme Coordinator since 2021. Her research interests lie in comparative law, tort law, and transdisciplinarity in legal education and practice. She has convened and taught a range of LLB, MLaw, LLM and JD modules, including legal methods and skills, tort law, criminal law, intellectual property law, and research methodologies, professional ethics and design. She is also a guest lecturer at the School of Arts, English and Languages at QUB, where she delivers a lecture series on law and language.

Contributors



Dr Philip Gavin is an Assistant Lecturer in Law in the School of Social Sciences, Law & Education, Technological University Dublin. He delivers modules in a range of private law and commercial law subjects, including Company Law, Law of Equity and Corporate Finance Law.



Dr Sarah Hamill is an Assistant Professor at the School of Law Trinity College Dublin. Since 2023 she has also been the Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning in the School of Law. Her teaching and research interests are in property law, housing law, and legal history.



Dr Maebh Harding is Professor of Family Law at UCD Sutherland School of Law. Her research combines a critical feminist perspective with empirical, historical and doctrinal rigour to challenge legal regulation of family life. She is an editor of the textbook *Family Law in Context* (Clarus 2023) and a founder of the Doing Feminist Legal Work network.



Tonbara Mordi is a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria and a non-practising solicitor of England and Wales. She is a Senior Lecturer (Academic Education) in Law at Brunel University and the Work Placement Coordinator at Brunel Law School. She has convened and has experience teaching various law subjects, including contract, tort, business, company, employment, and commercial law.



Aoife O'Donoghue is Professor of Law at Queens University Belfast. Her research examines how legal structures enable or prevent states, institutions and individuals to (not) act and the ramifications of such actions. She researches utopias and tyranny and the impact of Brexit. She was one of the Directors of the Northern/Ireland Feminist Judgments Project and now co-leads Feminist Constitutional Futures. She is a founder of the Doing Feminist Legal Work Network.



Professor Séverine Saintier has been in academia for far longer than she cares to admit. Educated in France and the UK, Séverine has been teaching and researching commercial law, contract, comparative law for since 1995. In Cardiff, she co-convenes contract and is director of admission and recruitment.



Further Resources

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