Sir William Dale

Sir William Dale, KCMG, has been Director of Studies of the Government Legal Advisers Course since 1976. Based at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, his role is about to expand as head of the newly-created Centre for Legislative Studies.

The annual Government Legal Advisers Course (GLAC), initiated by Sir William Dale, has operated for over 30 years and trained 600 legal officers from 60 countries as legislative draftsmen. A number of these legal officers have since gone on to attain leading posts within their own governments and international organisations. The scope of the course – and Sir William's role – continue to grow, and in 1993 the GLAC took in their own governments and international organisations. The scope of the course – and Sir William's role – continue to grow, and in 1993 the GLAC took in their own governments and international organisations.

In 1964 when the GLAC began Harold Macmillan had recently announced that the 'wind of change' was blowing through Africa and the governments of a number of newly independent (or soon to be independent) countries were facing up to the fact that once members of the Colonial Legal Service returned home, there was no-one on whom they could call to provide them with legal advice and assistance, particularly in the fields of international law and legislation. Sir William, who at the time was legal adviser to the Commonwealth Relations Office, had the idea of creating 'a kind of school' in London to provide solid courses of training, and the scheme took wing. His approach broke new ground, given that legislative drafting had never been taught before in a formal setting and draftsmen had traditionally acquired their skills within the office from more experienced colleagues.

The first 'course for government legal officers from overseas' was held at Marlborough House from 6 October 1964 until 5 March 1965. Legislative drafting was covered as comprehensively as possible, with time also devoted to international law centred around discussion of the particular problems that can arise in the conduct of external affairs and general topics of public law. Responsibility for administration and accommodation was taken by the Ministry of Overseas Development, which also provided most of the finance through the British Council.

It was soon clear that what came to be called the Government Legal Advisers Course had identified a real need, with around 20 students attending each year from a long list of countries. The first Director of Studies was Sir Edgar Unsworth, a former Chief Justice of Nyasaland, and the Chief Lecturer in International Law (subsequently Director) was Sir James Fawcett, who had been on the legal staff of the Foreign Office and later became President of the European Commission on Human Rights. They were assisted in the conduct of the course by over 50 people at various times, many of whom had tended to be overawed (with their keenness to become draftsmen correspondingly reduced) when presented with UK Acts as models.

NEEDS OF THE PRESENT

The GLAC and the Centre for Legislative Studies must now address the current need for advice in areas such as central Europe, where the former Communist countries are having to adapt their political, social and legal systems to the demands of a market economy. There is also the opportunity for Sir William and his team to liaise with initiatives being taken by the IALS, for example by assisting in the legal processes being undertaken by the Chinese government to help combat corruption.

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