

INUK as an umbrella for member innocence projects

When Dr Naughton established the University of Bristol Innocence Project, the first innocence project pro bono law clinic in the UK, he was literally inundated with requests by colleagues and students in other universities to help them to set up innocence project in their universities.

In response to this need, and because there were so many applications and so many eligible cases that needed to be worked on, from January 2005-September 2014, he used INUK as an umbrella organisation for facilitating the establishment of, and supporting the subsequent running of, member innocence projects in the UK . His thinking was simple: the more innocence projects, the more likely it would be for innocent victims of wrongful convictions to overturn their convictions.

During that time, INUK actively assisted in setting up 36 innocence projects – 35 in UK universities and one in a corporate law firm. 20 national training events and conferences were organised under the auspices of INUK to train staff and students in member innocence projects. Dr Naughton also devised a methodology for assessing applications/claims of innocence which was used to assess almost 1,500 applications for members, of which over 100 cases were referred to member innocence projects for further investigation.

In that time, the University of Bristol Innocence Project, for instance, made submissions and full applications on behalf of ‘clients’ to the CCRC (R v Hall, 2011) and Scottish CCRC (Beck v Her Majesty’s Advocate, 2013) who had their convictions successfully referred back to the appeal courts and successful assisted two clients in Parole Board oral hearings to progress to open prisons.

The overturning of Dwaine George’s murder conviction in December 2014, a case assessed and referred by Dr Naughton/INUK to Cardiff innocence project, provided further evidence of INUK’s success in identifying victims of wrongful convictions who have been failed by the existing criminal appeals system and the CCRC and cemented the evidence for the necessity and potential of innocence projects in the UK under the existing arrangements.

Overall, then, we celebrate the contribution that Dr Naughton/INUK made in establishing a new form of legal education in UK universities and beyond. Cases referred by INUK to member innocence projects have been shown to have been meritorious and to have fallen through the existing criminal appeals and CCRC systems.

We will keep a watchful eye on the 100 or so other cases that we assessed as eligible and referred to universities. We hope that those who took on those cases of alleged innocent victims of wrongful conviction and imprisonment who may be innocent will pursue all leads and explore all available forensic science techniques and possibilities in attempts to settle the claims of factual innocence one way or the other in the quest for justice for the wrongly convicted and the victims of crime at the heart of those cases.

The ball is now firmly in the court of the individual innocence projects and other criminal appeal and miscarriage of justice schemes that were set up to rival INUK just as they wanted.

It’s now over to them.....