

## **INNOCENCE UK IS COMING TO PLYMOUTH!**

***Sarah Butcher (Innocence Project Staff Coordinator)***

In autumn 2008, one year after final year LLB student, Marjorie Creek, voluntarily enrolled herself on the [Innocence Network UK](#) (INUK) annual national conference, and with considerable support from other final and second year students, the Innocence Project has been successfully launched at the University of Plymouth.

The national INUK project started in September 2004 at the University of Bristol. The Network was created because the problem of the wrongful conviction of innocent people was not sufficiently resolved by the creation of the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC). This is the body set up in the wake of notorious cases such as the Guildford 4 and the Birmingham 6 to investigate alleged cases of miscarriage of justice.

INUK is a university based initiative with three key aims; education, research and communication. The objective of INUK is 'educating to overturn and prevent the wrongful conviction of innocent people.' Currently 20 universities are participating in the project but Plymouth is one of only two it forms part of a final year assessed module.

Education is the very much the focus of the project at Plymouth. The Innocence Project has been established as part of a third year module called Work Based Learning. The module enables students to gain relevant work experience and reflect upon their experience. The integration of the Innocence Project into the module provides further opportunities for voluntary work adding in addition to those gained through the South West Employment Rights Centre and Devon Law Clinic. With such a competitive legal job market for training contracts and pupillages having such first hand work experience is vital for graduating students.

The students have many tasks ahead of them, not only dealing with the incoming cases, but also to set up processes and procedures to help them deal efficiently and effectively with such information. A web site is being prepared, the student portal discussion board is in full flow with ideas and we are developing a working relationship with [Foot Anstey](#), a local law firm, who will be providing the legal advice where necessary.

This is a very exciting project for law students at Plymouth. While the project is open to Work Based Learning students and five second year students this year, it is hoped that as the project develops that participation can be opened up to other students across the various Law courses both at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Two of the students who are participating in the inaugural year of the project have also contributed to this piece, final year student Marjorie Creek who originally pushed for the project to be run at Plymouth (see accompanying report) and second year student Laura Gomme whose views follow below.

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## **AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY**

### ***Laura Gomme (Stage 2 Student LLB)***

Up until about 2 months ago I was completely unaware that the Innocence Project existed, it was only when I received an email from Sarah telling us a little about the aims of the project and asking for applications from people who would be interested in joining that I heard about it for the first time. There was already a group of third year students working on the project, and 5 more second year students were needed to complete the group. I was instantly attracted to the idea, and was excited about the possibility of getting involved; it seemed like a fascinating and perhaps a little glamorous project to be a part of.

I was aware that occasionally miscarriages of justice occur, and knew about the high profile cases that appear in the news like the Birmingham 6 and the Guilford 4, but it wasn't until I began looking on the Internet and researching in more detail the Innocence Network UK that I realised it was more than that. There is a huge problem that the project is trying to solve and there is a definite need for it. The thing that shocked me the most was that whilst a prisoner is maintaining their innocence they are unable to be considered for parole, so enter a catch 22 situation of maintaining innocence with very little realistic hope of release or claim guilt with the intention that they would gain back their freedom. In an ideal world there would be no need for such a project, but unfortunately such an initiative is desperately needed, as for those prisoners maintaining their innocence there really are very few alternatives available to them and a serious lack of money within the system.

Now the project has begun I am still as excited as before and really eager to get going and receive the cases to work on. Even after only a few meetings I realise that this really is not as glamorous as first thought, it is going to be long, hard work and in reality it may not solve anything, which is sometimes a difficult thought to contend with whilst trying to remain enthusiastic, but the fact that there are few other alternatives available provides enough motivation to keep going.

