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Pracademic pedagogy and the practice of public law

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Abstract

This article examines the development and delivery of *The Practice of Public Law in Northern Ireland* (POPL), which is an advanced undergraduate module designed to offer an authentic, ethically informed experience of public law in practice within a jurisdiction where the government legal service plays a central role. The article positions this initiative within the limited literature on pracademia in legal education, noting that public law from a governmental perspective is an unexplored site of clinically inspired pedagogy. Drawing on the Carnegie Report's call for the integration of legal knowledge, skills, and professional identity, as well as several sources of legal ethics principles, the paper explores how such frameworks can inform curriculum design in politically sensitive legal environments. Employing a reflective, co-authored methodology that integrates scholarly and practitioner perspectives, it offers a contextualised account of the module's pedagogical distinctiveness and the challenges of balancing realism with professional and curricular constraints. These perspectives are nested in the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, where constitutional law, administrative law, and the politics of a divided society intersect with civil service and legal professional values. The paper goes on to make a broader claim about the value of carefully designed experiential learning as a means of fostering professional ethics and governmental literacy among law students, and the jurisdictionally transferable potential of these features.

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Introduction

Experiential and clinically oriented approaches to legal education have become increasingly prominent in recent decades, reflecting a wider recognition that the professional formation of law students requires more than the accumulation of doctrinal knowledge and skills.[1] The case for integrating legal theory with practice-based learning has been made forcefully and repeatedly in several jurisdictions, with perhaps the most notable and enduring intervention of this sort being the Carnegie Report on educating US lawyers, which emphasised the need to fuse legal knowledge, professional skills, and ethical identity.[2] It is notable that most clinical legal education schemes have tended to be associated with the provision of legal services to disadvantaged individuals and communities,[3] meeting unmet legal need while forming future legal professionals, rather than on the provision of legal services to institutional government clients. However, in both contexts, their legal education is a

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[1] For a good introduction to the international landscape, see Jeff Giddings (ed), *Global Clinical Legal Education* (Routledge 2025); Frank S Bloch (ed), *The Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice* (OUP 2011); for the UK landscape, see Emma Jones, Hugh McFaul and Francine Ryan, 'Clinical Legal Education in the United Kingdom: Origins, Growth and the Technological Innovations and Challenges of Its Future' (2017) 4 German Journal of Legal Education 107; Vicky Kemp, Tine Munk and Suzanne Gower, 'Clinical Legal Education and Experiential Learning: Looking to the Future' (University of Manchester 2016) <https://nottingham-repository.worktribe.com/output/802967/clinical-legal-education-and-experiential-learning-looking-to-the-future> accessed 29 August 2025; for Ireland, see Lawrence Donnelly, 'Developing Irish Clinical Legal Education' in Jennifer Schweppe and Thomas Mohr (eds), *30 Years of Legal Scholarship* (Round Hall Ltd 2011). Also see Richard Grimes and others, 'Legal Clinics in the UK and Ireland: Past, Present and Future' in Jeff Giddings (ed), *Global Clinical Legal Education* (Routledge 2025).

[2] William M Sullivan and others, *Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law* (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2007).

[3] See, eg, Kemp, Munk and Gower (n 1) 3–4. Some recent initiatives have been more commercially focused, but these are in a minority. See Tobore O Okah-avae, 'Clinical Legal Education: A Paradigm for Business Entities' in Omar Madhloom and Hugh McFaul (eds), *Thinking About Clinical Legal Education: Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives* (Routledge 2022); Steven Vaughan, Linden Thomas and Bharat Malkani, 'Clinical Legal Education Reimagined' in Linden Thomas and others (eds), *Reimagining Clinical Legal Education* (Hart Publishing 2018) 8; Elaine Campbell, 'A Dangerous Method? Defending the Rise of Business Law Clinics in the UK' (2015) 49 The Law Teacher 165.

crucible for the formation of professional skills and values which will drive a lawyer's future actions. This paper explores how the pedagogical principles underpinning the clinical education movement were adapted to the context of an advanced public law module taught in Northern Ireland from a predominantly governmental point of view.

The Practice of Public Law in Northern Ireland (POPL) provides students with a structured, ethically informed simulation of government legal work, with two goals. The first is to allow students to learn and understand the individuality and intricacies of the institutions set up after the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998. The second, drawing inspiration from the integrationist vision of the Carnegie Report and from international and domestic standards of professional ethics, such as those developed by the International Bar Association (IBA)[4] and the Code of Conduct of the Northern Ireland Bar,[5] is to reproduce aspects of real-world public law practice without breaching the confidentiality or operational sensitivities that constrain disclosure about government work and so help to form the students as public lawyers. As a 20-credit, 12-week undergraduate module offered to final-year law students at Queen's University Belfast, POPL built upon the foundations laid by orthodox modules on public law studied earlier in the students' degree programmes. Since its inauguration in 2021–22, the module has been delivered to four groups consisting of approximately 10–15 students per year. Each group has engaged with realistic but fictionalised scenarios requiring a distinctively governmental standpoint, enabling them to grapple with questions of legality, constitutional propriety and ethical judgement in ways rarely accessible by way of conventional teaching formats. Thus, the module has required its participants to ask themselves: when you are in the eye of the storm, advising a powerful government client on public law issues, what values and skills will anchor you as you guide your clients to a safe harbour?

This paper situates POPL within the broader literature on clinical legal education, focusing in particular on the incomplete discussion of pracademia in public law settings. While the term 'pracademic' has gained some currency

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[4] 'IBA International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession' (International Bar Association 2011).

[5] The Bar of Northern Ireland's Code of Conduct (2022) can be found here: <https://www.barofni.com/page/code-of-conduct> accessed 18 September 2025. For the analogous ethical rules applicable to solicitors in Northern Ireland, see the Solicitors Practice Regulations 1987 (as amended).

in criminal justice scholarship,[6] its application to public law teaching is poorly recorded. As a descriptive shorthand for pedagogical work that is consciously informed by both academic and practice-based expertise, the term is not intended to demarcate an exclusive category of law teacher, nor to suggest that either practitioners or academics lack legitimacy outside this hybrid teaching technique. Rather, our pracademic badging is simply meant to signal the particular benefits that can be gleaned by way of structured engagement between these two perspectives. In the present context, a co-authored approach brings together practical and scholarly viewpoints to examine the rationale, design, and delivery of POPL. The analysis is attentive both to the conceptual frameworks that informed the module and to the distinguishing features of government legal practice in Northern Ireland, where constitutional law, administrative law, and the politics of a divided society intersect with civil service and legal professional values.

The paper is structured as follows. Part 1 outlines the international and theoretical foundations that inform the paper's approach, including the Carnegie Report's integrationist model, several sources of legal ethics principles, and some leading works on pracademia and reflective methodology. Part 2 elaborates on the political and institutional context of public law practice in Northern Ireland, highlighting several factors that shape the work of government lawyers in the jurisdiction. Part 3 offers a detailed account of how and why the POPL module was designed and delivered as it was. Part 4 draws together reflections on the challenges and benefits of this approach, with particular attention being paid to its implications for professional identity formation and constitutional literacy. The conclusion considers whether there is potential for adapting this model to other jurisdictions.

Pedagogical foundations

POPL was informed by a convergence of conceptual and normative frameworks that together offered a coherent basis for constructing an ethically grounded, experientially rich approach to public law teaching. This part of our paper sets out those foundations, namely the integrationist model of legal education proposed by the Carnegie Report; the ethical principles articulated by the IBA and its domestic equivalents, as well as certain insights drawn from

[6] For an indispensable overview, see Di Turgoose, Victoria Knight and Darren Woodward, *Pracademics in Criminal Justice* (Routledge 2025).

the leading literature on pracademia and reflective methodology. Taken together, these sources have provided both a conceptual vocabulary and a set of guiding values for the module, while allowing scope for adaptation to the distinctive political and institutional conditions of Northern Ireland.

The Carnegie Report, formally titled *Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law*, advanced a powerful critique of the traditional separation between legal doctrine, skills training, and the inculcation of professional identity.[7] It argued that effective legal education must integrate these three 'apprenticeships',[8] enabling students not only to understand the law and apply it competently, but also to internalise the ethical standards and public responsibilities of the profession. While its primary empirical focus was the United States, the report's core insights have been applied elsewhere, including in common law jurisdictions with differing professional structures.[9] For the purposes of POPL, the Carnegie model offered a rationale for embedding ethical and constitutional reflection within exercises that also demanded doctrinal analysis and practical decision-making. This integrationist approach was particularly apt for a module concerned with the role and specific context of government lawyers in Northern Ireland, whose responsibilities cannot be reduced to either technical competence or abstract principle alone.

The IBA's *International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession* further complemented this vision by articulating a set of ethical standards with global applicability. These principles address fundamental duties such as independence, integrity, the avoidance of conflicts of interest, and respect for the rule of law. While not binding in any jurisdiction, they will come as no surprise to readers of the Bar of Northern Ireland's Code of Conduct,[10] among other domestic frameworks, and provide a useful benchmark against which to assess the conduct expected of lawyers in different institutional contexts. For POPL, they served as an implicit ethical horizon: students were not lectured on

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[7] Sullivan and others (n 2); also see William M Sullivan, 'After Ten Years: The Carnegie Report and Contemporary Legal Education' (2018) 14 University of St. Thomas Law Journal 331.
[8] Sullivan and others (n 2) 8.
[9] See, eg, Michael Murphy, 'How Working With Entrepreneurs Makes Law Students Into Happier, Healthier Lawyers' in Matthew Atkinson and Ben Livings (eds), *Contemporary Challenges in Clinical Legal Education: Role, Function and Future Directions* (Routledge 2023) 167.
[10] The Bar of Northern Ireland's Code of Conduct (n 5).

the IBA Principles in an abstract way, but the scenarios and reflective exercises were designed in ways that would prompt consideration of the values they embody and guest lecturers reflected on their legal values in the cases and situations in which they had advised. The teaching team reflected on the relationship between legal codes of conduct and the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Code of Ethics[11] and Ministerial Code[12] and assessments required students, *inter alia,* to identify and resolve ethical issues in practical scenarios. This allowed for a form of experiential ethics learning that was integrated into substantive legal problem-solving rather than presented as a stand-alone topic.

Recent literature on 'pracademia' provides a further lens through which POPL can be considered.[13] Although the term has attracted considerably more attention in the sphere of criminal justice than it has in law,[14] it captures a form of professional-academic hybridity that is undoubtedly relevant to law. Pracademics are those who, drawing on substantial professional experience, engage in teaching and research that remain closely connected to practice. As Pousadela and others have said, this enables them to

> enhance the social relevance of academic work, provide theoretically informed solutions to practical challenges, serve as critical friends and brokers between different stakeholders, facilitate inter-organisational dialogue, enrich shared vocabularies and methodologies, and raise important ethical questions that challenge both academic and practice communities.[15]

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[11] The NICS Code of Ethics, revised as a result of the recommendations of the *Independent Public Inquiry into the Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme* (Department of Finance, March 2020) can be found here: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/articles/nics-code-ethics-html-version> accessed 18 September 2025.

[12] Compliance with the Ministerial Code is a statutory requirement under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, s 28A. See <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/topics/ministerial-code> accessed 23 January 2025.

[13] For the leading account of pracademia in general terms, see Paul Posner, 'The Pracademic: An Agenda for Re-Engaging Practitioners and Academics' (2009) 29 Public Budgeting and Finance 12.

[14] Turgoose, Knight and Woodward (n 6).

[15] Inés M Pousadela and others, 'Between Worlds, beyond Boundaries: Understanding Pracademic Contributions to Social Change' (2025) 35 Development in Practice 175, 178.

This dualistic account offers a foundation for understanding how the particular knowledge, skills and experiences developed in a specialist field of practice can inform public law pedagogy. While 'in-between-ness' is sometimes characterised as a source of difficulty, Ainslie has persuasively argued for 'greater recognition of liminality as a positive force'.[16] In public law, pracademia can certainly offer distinctive benefits by enabling the design of realistic learning activities that reflect the pressures, institutional dynamics, and ethical complexities of government lawyering. The existing literature contains no discussion of pracademia in public law from a governmental perspective, leaving a gap that this paper seeks to address. The co-authored nature of this account – combining the scholarly perspective of a full-time public law academic with the practical insight of a senior government lawyer – is intended to exemplify the kind of dialogue that can enrich both legal education and professional understanding, with richness for the participants, their students and their hinterland of colleagues in the academy and in practice.

Lastly, the methodology adopted in developing and analysing POPL drew on elements of autoethnography, primarily in the sense that it incorporates the lead author's reflective account of her own professional practice and its translation into an educational setting. Autoethnography is 'a qualitative research method that allows researchers to draw upon personal experiences to extend the understanding of social phenomena', such that the authors are both 'researchers' and 'researched'.[17] While this paper is not an exclusively autoethnographic study, it shares that method's commitment to reflexivity and transparency, recognising that the positionality of the authors is central to the insights offered herein.

These conceptual and methodological foundations directly informed the structuring of the POPL curriculum, the crafting of its fictionalised but realistic scenarios, and the assessment design, all of which will be explored in subsequent parts of this article. Before turning to that analysis, it is necessary

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[16] Sam Ainslie, 'Learning to Live with Liminality: Reflections of a Probation Pracademic on Joining the Academy' in Di Turgoose, Victoria Knight and Darren Woodward (eds), *Pracademics in Criminal Justice* (Routledge 2025) 68.

[17] Sarah Nixon, '"When You Have Walked the Walk …": Transitions from Prison Landings to Higher Education (HE)' in Di Turgoose, Victoria Knight and Darren Woodward (eds), *Pracademics in Criminal Justice* (Routledge 2025) 119. More generally, see Carolyn Ellis, Tony E Adams and Arthur P Bochner, 'Autoethnography: An Overview' (2011) 36 Historical Social Research 273.

to outline the political and institutional context in which public law is practised in Northern Ireland, since this context both shaped the module and underpins the challenges it sought to address.

Pedagogical contexts

Any effort to simulate the work of public lawyers in Northern Ireland must begin with a recognition of the jurisdiction's distinctive constitutional and political character. Northern Ireland operates within the United Kingdom's uncodified constitutional framework, but its governance is shaped to a large extent by the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998 and its statutory manifestations, which confer substantial legislative and executive competence on devolved institutions.[18] The journey to the present time has involved recurrent periods of suspension and re-formation, giving an intermittent pattern of devolution and direct rule from Westminster.[19] Even while devolution is functioning, the UK government remains a significant player in relation to significant non-devolved matters.[20] Such complexity and periodic instability affects the daily realities of government legal work, as lawyers must navigate fluctuating distributions of authority, and a nuanced relationship between devolved and central government actors. More particularly, legal advisers need to be well-versed in the theory, history, and practical outworkings of the constitutional settlement, so as to be able to advise on shaping and strengthening the still-young devolved institutions to meet new needs without sacrificing either legal validity or workability.

The institutions were formed by negotiation and shaped to manage a political landscape reflecting Northern Ireland's history of division along constitutional and community lines. Public law disputes often arise in contexts where legal questions are inextricable from political sensitivities, and where the consequences of legal advice may reverberate beyond the immediate client to affect intergovernmental relations, public confidence, and the delicate balance of power-sharing arrangements. For government lawyers, this demands a

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[18] Brice Dickson and Conor McCormick, *Law in Northern Ireland* (5th edn, Hart Publishing 2026) Ch 2; Siobhan Keegan, 'Justice Devolved – Milestones in Northern Ireland Constitutional Law Since 2010' in Eoin Carolan, Jason N E Varuhas and Sarah Fulham-McQuillan (eds), *The Making and Re-Making of Public Law* (Hart Publishing 2025) 52–55.
[19] Dickson and McCormick (n 18) 8–22.
[20] Set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Schs 2 and 3, as amended.

heightened situational awareness of the context to their legal work, as well as a commitment to the civil service values of integrity, honesty, objectivity, and impartiality.[21] These values, formally articulated in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) *Code of Ethics*,[22] underpin the legitimacy of advice to Ministers and provide an ethical compass in situations where political and other external pressures are acute.

POPL recognises that students who enter the world of government in Northern Ireland may do so as elected representatives, Ministers, special advisers, civil servants, government lawyers, members of the Bar's government civil panel, solicitors in independent practice, journalists, lobbyists or civil society activists.[23] POPL posits that a future involving any of these roles will benefit from a course taught from the distinctive position and discipline of government legal service, which sits at the interface of all these careers. In addition to providing a full range of 'normal' litigation and transactional services, government lawyers advise Ministers and officials on a wide range of distinctive matters, from the legality of proposed legislation to the procedural propriety of administrative action or the viability of new policy proposals. They may be required to draft primary or secondary legislation, work closely with teams developing public policy and strategy, represent the government in high-profile judicial review proceedings (including proceedings where one unit of government wishes to challenge another), or negotiate complex agreements with other jurisdictions. The work is therefore inherently multidisciplinary, blending elements of constitutional law, administrative law, human rights law, and legislative drafting, as well as creative problem-solving, policy analysis, and reading people. It also demands familiarity with the interface between domestic and international legal obligations – an interface made more intricate

[21] For helpful insights on lawyering from a UK Government perspective, see Terence Daintith and Alan Page, *Executive Self-Government and the Constitution* (Oxford University Press 2025) Chs 9–10; Philip SC Lewis and Linda Mulcahy, 'Government Lawyers: Technicians, Policy Shapers and Organisational Brakes' (2021) 28 International Journal of the Legal Profession 23; Terence Daintith and Alan Page, *The Executive in the Constitution: Structure, Autonomy, and Internal Control* (Oxford University Press 1999) Chs 7–10. Also see Conor McCormick, *The Constitutional Legitimacy of Law Officers in the United Kingdom* (Hart Publishing 2022).

[22] NICS Code of Ethics (n 11).

[23] Queen's law graduates are represented in all of these roles in Northern Ireland.

in the wake of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and the creation of the Northern Ireland Protocol and the Windsor Framework.[24]

The constitutional settlement also shapes the environment in which public law operates. The separation of powers in Northern Ireland, though formally akin to that in other Westminster-derived systems, is conditioned by the realities of mandatory coalitions and the 'consociational' nature of the constitution more broadly.[25] In addition to a legislature and executive with distinct formal features of negotiation, power-sharing and cross-party safeguards, judicial review has become a particularly important mechanism for ensuring legality and holding the Executive to account, with the Northern Ireland courts frequently called upon to adjudicate on matters of political salience.[26] In such cases, the government legal service must prepare arguments that are both legally robust and sensitive to the broader constitutional stakes, recognising that adverse judgments or their own choice of argument may have significant political impacts. The NICS and legal professional values outlined above are at the very heart of how civil servants, and in particular government lawyers, advise and retain the trust of successive Ministers in ways which manage the risk of their desired actions in the context of institutions of shared government.

For educators seeking to prepare students for this milieu, a purely doctrinal approach has undeniable limits. This is all the more notable in a small jurisdiction like Northern Ireland, where specific legal knowledge and skills are not always written down, meaning that oral transmission by way of professional networks is often a necessity.[27] As such, it is essential to convey

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[24] See Lisa Claire Whitten, *Brexit and the Northern Ireland Constitution* (Oxford University Press 2023); Christopher McCrudden (ed), *The Law and Practice of the Ireland-Northern Ireland Protocol* (Cambridge University Press 2022).
[25] See Siobhan Keegan, 'Public Law Developments Since *Re Buick*' (Government Legal Service of Northern Ireland Annual Conference, Queen's University Belfast, 19 November 2025) <https://www.judiciaryni.uk/publications/lady-chief-justice-glsni-conference-public-law-developments-re-buick-19-november-2025> accessed 17 December 2025; Siobhan Keegan (n 18) 52–55; Conor McCormick, 'The Three Tiers of Executive Power in Northern Ireland' in Brice Dickson and Conor McCormick (eds), *The Judicial Mind: A Festschrift for Lord Kerr of Tonaghmore* (Hart Publishing 2021).
[26] See Gordon Anthony, *Judicial Review in Northern Ireland* (3rd edn, Hart Publishing 2024); Gordon Anthony, 'The Quartet Plus Two: Judicial Review in Northern Ireland' in Lindsay Stirton and others (eds), *Executive Decision-making and the Courts* (Hart Publishing 2020).
[27] See John Morison and Philip Leith, *The Barrister's World and the Nature of Law* (Open University Press 1991).

both the specific legal rules and principles governing public law decision-making and the institutional dynamics, ethical constraints, and strategic considerations that shape how those rules are applied in practice. POPL sought to do this by creating realistic but anonymised scenarios that incorporated the pressures, complexities, and ambiguities characteristic of real government legal work in Northern Ireland. In the classroom and in their assessments, the students are asked to consider scenarios relating to realistic social or economic problems where their fictional clients might be Ministers who wish to pursue risky policy decisions, special advisers who make legally unwise statements or civil servants anxious about their vires or eager not to disclose embarrassing information. The scenarios are designed to develop the professional judgement and persuasion needed to advise powerful and strong-minded clients and to engage the ethical frameworks applying to all the players in the drama, in a practice area where it would be near-impossible to give students the opportunity to encounter 'proper' clinical work. By embedding these scenarios within a pedagogical framework informed by the Carnegie Report's integrationist model and various principles of legal ethics, the module aimed to offer students a richer understanding of how public law is practised on the ground.

The next part of this paper examines the conceptual and practical considerations that guided the design of the POPL module, explaining how the contextual factors outlined above were translated into specific learning activities, assessment tasks, and reflective exercises. In doing so, it shows how experiential learning can be adapted to public law teaching in a way that is both contextually and theoretically informed.

Pedagogical design and delivery

Having set out the principles and contexts that shaped POPL, this section moves from the conceptual to the concrete. It examines how the module's pedagogical commitments were enacted in practice, drawing on selected teaching activities, assessment exercises, and classroom dynamics to illustrate the fusion of cognitive, practical, and ethical learning points. While the scenarios described here are necessarily simplified to preserve the confidentiality and distinctiveness of the course, they are rooted in the political and institutional realities that the module sought to simulate. By framing this section as an applied illustration rather than a comprehensive narrative, the aim is to demonstrate how abstract commitments – such as embedding ethical

reasoning, modelling professional judgement, and fostering critical engagement with legal structures – were translated into the cut and thrust of weekly classes.

Constitutional orientation

The module's opening phase was designed to familiarise students with the distinctive terrain of public law in Northern Ireland, while simultaneously signalling that this was not a conventional doctrinal course. Rather than beginning with theoretical constitutional principles or an exhaustive survey of institutions, the teaching team introduced students to the practical and ethical realities of working within public law settings. This orientation took the form of an early set of lectures and seminars that combined high-level constitutional context-setting with immersive, scenario-based exercises intended to provoke reflection on the role of the institutional public lawyer. As such, the course mirrored the professional experience of entering a new role within government or a public body, where contextual awareness and professional agility are as important as technical knowledge.

The initial lectures set out the broad contours of Northern Ireland's constitutional architecture, with particular attention being paid to its multi-layered governance structure. Importantly, this overview was linked directly to the kinds of legal questions a public lawyer might encounter in practice – questions often situated at the intersection of devolved and reserved competencies and frequently complicated by political sensitivities. By explicating constitutional law as an evolving and contested framework rather than a static set of rules, and telling the story of how this particular set of institutions and safeguards had reached their present form, the teaching team laid the groundwork for the reflective and adaptive mindset that would underpin the rest of the course. The interplay of core constitutional principles – namely the rule of law, the separation of powers and parliamentary sovereignty – was a focus at this early stage, and scenarios explored how these principles influence events in the real world and can exist (and arguably function at their best) in tension.

From the outset, students were encouraged to consider their own positionality in relation to the institutions they were studying. This was not presented as an abstract sociological exercise, but as a practical necessity for anyone engaged in public law work. In classroom discussions, the teaching team encouraged

the students to engage with and work through the lawyer's core ethical stance – the need to set aside personal political or other views to give impartial advice and the commitment to legal professional and constitutional values such as the rule of law. Thus students had the opportunity to begin to form their own legal professional values. The facilitation of these discussions was informed by literature on reflective practice in legal education which emphasises that self-awareness is a foundational professional skill,[28] particularly in areas of law that are deeply embedded in questions of governance and public accountability.

The first phase also introduced students to the idea that public law problems rarely present themselves in neatly packaged legal questions. Instead, they often emerge from complex policy environments, incomplete information, and the pressures of political decision-making. To make this point tangible, early seminar exercises placed students in hypothetical advisory roles, requiring them to identify legal issues from factual scenarios that were deliberately ambiguous and contested, and to develop an appropriate policy response. This approach encouraged them to develop the professional habit of framing problems accurately before attempting to solve them.

Throughout this orientation, the emphasis was on active participation rather than passive reception. Students worked in small groups to dissect these scenarios, present preliminary advice, and defend their reasoning to peers. This was not simply a matter of practising advocacy, negotiation or conferencing, but of developing the ability to justify decisions in a manner that was legally sound, ethically defensible, and contextually sensitive. The iterative feedback provided in these early sessions allowed students to calibrate their approach, making connections between their fledgling practice and the conceptual underpinnings introduced in earlier lectures.

Finally, the orientation phase underscored the importance of professional values in shaping public law practice. While legal ethics were not formally presented as a discrete topic, their importance was stressed throughout the learning process by way of a constant emphasis on independence, integrity, and the public interest. Guest lectures re-emphasised this aspect, with speakers

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[28] See, eg, Rachel Spencer, 'Reflection, Self-Awareness, and Cultural Competency as a Foundational Pedagogy for Clinical Legal Education' in Matthew Atkinson and Ben Livings (eds), *Contemporary Challenges in Clinical Legal Education: Role, Function and Future Directions* (Routledge 2023) 76–86.

encouraged to share practical examples (within reason) and students reminded that the Chatham House rule applied. One of the module's ground rules is 'no hot takes on social media', and this rule has been well respected.

Practical simulations

Following this initial orientation, the module transitioned into a phase where students engaged with complex, practice-based simulations designed to emulate the realities of working as a public lawyer in government or quasi-governmental contexts. In designing these exercises, the teaching team drew upon experiential learning theory, which emphasises the value of authentic, situated tasks in promoting deeper engagement and the development of professional judgement.[29] The simulations were conducted in ordinary teaching spaces and did not rely on specialist courtroom facilities or formal dress, with professional conventions instead communicated through role-briefs, timed tasks, and reflective debriefs. The scenarios were not generic moot problems; they were crafted to reflect the procedural, political, and institutional constraints that shape public law decision-making in Northern Ireland, while also resonating with universal challenges faced by lawyers and policy-makers working in public service elsewhere.

One of the most distinctive aspects of these simulations was their multi-stage design. One fictional case study early in term required the students to work up a proposal for a public hire e-scooter pilot. The challenges were first to balance the Minister's desire to proceed at pace with the need to change road traffic legislation, and second to balance the need for the scheme to be self-financing with the Minister's desire that it be socially inclusive. In week one, students had the opportunity to write a policy memorandum, on which they received feedback, and then in week two to orally brief a 'Minister' and persuade them of the benefits of their policy proposal. During the Covid lockdown, several civil service colleagues kindly agreed to portray a challenging Minister on Zoom who were briefed to provide political 'pushback' to the students' policies, and then moved out of role to provide constructive feedback. However, once the University moved back to in-person teaching, running this

[29] See, eg, Jeff Giddings and Jacqueline Weinberg, 'Experiential Legal Education: Stepping Back to See the Future' in Catrina Denvir (ed), *Modernising Legal Education* (Cambridge University Press 2020).

as a simultaneous in-class exercise became too logistically challenging, and the exercise became a peer-briefing instead.

The exercises unfolded over several weeks, with the students' own input shaping the narrative, revealing new information and shifting priorities in a manner that mirrored the evolving nature of government work. For instance, in the e-scooter scheme, a fictional stakeholder group concerned about the disability impacts challenged the e-scooter scheme by way of judicial review and students were provided with a Pre-Action Protocol letter. The response depended on the exact shape of each group of students' proposal. In responding, students were introduced to the Attorney General's Guidance on Legal Risk[30] as a tool to use in considering how a public lawyer might advise robustly and objectively. This incremental revelation of facts forced students to adapt their analysis dynamically, cultivating a professional mindset attuned to uncertainty and change. This design also encouraged the development of strategic thinking, as students learned to anticipate possible developments and to provide advice that was both responsive to immediate needs and mindful of longer-term implications. Scenarios were also designed to raise issues (such as the conflicting needs to move quickly and to engage widely) which embedded ethical reflection into the fabric of practical learning.

To preserve a sense of authenticity, the fact patterns used in these simulations were fictional but inspired by anonymised and adapted composites of the sorts of issues that might occur in the real world, rather than based on decided and published case studies. This approach ensured that students encountered problems with the complexity, ambiguity, and factual density characteristic of governmental work, without disclosing sensitive information or creating a resource where the answer was already known. The lead author's professional experience in senior public law roles was instrumental in shaping these scenarios, enabling the construction of exercises that balanced realism with pedagogical clarity of purpose. This blending of practitioner insight and academic framing epitomised the module's pracademic character, grounding learning in practical expertise and developing students' judgement while situating it within broader theoretical debates about public law practice.

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[30] Attorney General's Guidance on Legal Risk (Attorney General's Office, 2024) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-attorney-generals-guidance-on-legal-risk> accessed 18 September 2025.

Assessment within this phase was formative rather than summative, with feedback emphasising process as much as outcome. Students were encouraged to reflect on the reasoning behind their advice, the choices they made about framing issues, and the strategies they employed to manage uncertainty and risk. In group debriefings, different approaches were compared, revealing the plurality of defensible professional responses to complex public law problems. This collaborative reflection not only deepened the students' understanding of doctrinal and procedural matters but also underscored the inherently interpretive and value-laden nature of public law work.

An important by-product of the simulations was their capacity to cultivate a richer understanding of institutional relationships. In many exercises, the 'client' was not an individual but an organisational entity, meaning that advice had to take account of bureaucratic hierarchies, interdepartmental coordination, and political accountability mechanisms. Students were required to navigate the boundaries and interplay of institutional checks and balances as they worked. By grappling with these dimensions, students moved beyond a narrow conception of law as a self-contained discipline, instead appreciating how legal work is embedded within broader governance systems. This insight aligns with contemporary calls in the legal education literature for curricula that equip graduates to operate effectively in multi-actor, inter-institutional contexts.[31]

Perhaps the most striking feature of this phase was the way in which students began to internalise the rhythms and pressures of public law practice. The requirement to deliver clear, concise, and actionable advice under time constraints replicated the demands of government service, where policy timelines often leave little room for extended deliberation. Through repeated exposure to such conditions, students developed greater confidence in their capacity to analyse complex problems efficiently without sacrificing rigour or ethical integrity. This capacity – to act decisively in uncertain environments while remaining mindful of professional values and maintaining client trust – was one of the module's main learning outcomes, and the simulations proved to be a particularly effective vehicle for achieving it. In effect, simulations and a time-bounded final assessment exposed the students to a level of pressure sufficient to create a realistic flavour of government lawyering in real life, but

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[31] See, eg, Peter Čuroš, 'Using Institutional Theory in Legal Education' in Omar Madhloom and Hugh McFaul (eds), *Thinking About Clinical Legal Education: Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives* (Routledge 2022).

avoided overwhelming them in a way which would disrupt the learning experience.[32]

Professional ethics

The transition from simulated exercises to a focused engagement with professional ethics represented a deliberate deepening of the module's pedagogy. While earlier stages had introduced students to the pressures and complexities of public law practice in a practical sense, this phase invited them to reflect explicitly on the normative and professional commitments that underpin such work. The aim was not to treat ethics as a separate or ancillary topic, but to show how it is woven into the very fabric of public law decision-making and accountability mechanisms. In other words, the module positioned ethics not as an optional extra but as an indispensable dimension of competent practice – integral to understanding the role of the public lawyer and to cultivating the habits of mind required to sustain professional integrity over the course of a career. A light-hearted example is illustrative of the ethos. In a final, pre-Christmas lecture for the 2025 cohort, the lecturer passed around a tin of chocolates during the lecture and at the end asked the students to take 10 minutes to fill in module reviews. The guest lecturer joked 'But do the chocolates not mean…?' and the students immediately replied 'That we have a conflict of interest!'

The pedagogical underpinnings of this segment drew on both legal professional and civil service ethical standards. The contents of the Bar of Northern Ireland's Code of Conduct[33] chime harmoniously with the international standards in the IBA's *International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession*.[34] Their emphasis on independence, honesty, integrity, and the avoidance of conflicts of interest provided conceptual scaffolding for examining the real-world dilemmas that public lawyers face. These values are also at the heart of the NICS *Code of Ethics* which closely mirrors that of the

[32] See Jasper P Sluijs, Herman Kasper Gilissen and Karin (CJ) van Look, 'Training Law Students like Athletes: Experimenting with the Constraints-Led Approach in Law Clinics' (2023) 57 The Law Teacher 458.
[33] The Bar of Northern Ireland's Code of Conduct (n 5).
[34] 'IBA International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession' (n 4).

UK Civil Service.[35] The interplay between these professional codes, alongside the Ministerial Code and Nolan Principles, offered a valuable means of exploring both the universal and context-specific dimensions of professional ethics in public law. Students were thus able to experience how shared professional ideals are refracted through the institutional and constitutional arrangements in which government lawyers operate.

Much of the literature on public sector and public interest lawyering highlights cinematic moments of stark moral choice, redolent of Jack Nicholson shouting 'You can't handle the truth!' in *A Few Good Men*.[36] This tendency is evident, for example, in legal ethics scholarship which explores professional responsibility through highly abstract or extreme case studies – a common touchstone being the normative expectations of lawyers in Nazi Germany and other heinous contexts – rather than through the more typical institutional conditions of contemporary public law practice.[37] Scholarship by McEvoy, Mallinder and Bryson offers a valuable corrective to the risk of hackneyed thinking that can arise from an over-reliance on such extreme case studies, important though it is to consider them, by examining a variety of multi-faceted and nuanced ethical challenges for public lawyers in a range of societies undergoing conflict or transition.[38] In addition, it should be emphasised that situations prompting government lawyers to feel they are in an untenable position and must resign or to become a whistleblower can occur even in

[35] NICS Code of Ethics (n 11), issued by the Department of Finance under the Civil Service (NI) Order 1999. The UK Civil Service Code was first introduced in 1996 and put on a statutory footing in Part 1 of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.
[36] *A Few Good Men* (Castle Rock Entertainment 1992).
[37] See, eg, David Luban, 'Complicity and Lesser Evils: A Tale of Two Lawyers' (2021) 34 Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics 613; Cynthia Fountaine, 'Complicity in the Perversion of Justice: The Role of Lawyers in Eroding the Rule of Law in the Third Reich' (2020) 10 St Mary's Journal on Legal Malpractice and Ethics 198.
[38] Kieran McEvoy, Louise Mallinder and Anna Bryson, *Lawyers in Conflict and Transition* (Cambridge University Press 2022).

historically stable democracies such as the United Kingdom[39] or the United States.[40]

However, focusing exclusively on such dramatic examples does students a disservice. Most lawyers, whether in government or independent practice, will encounter occasions in their careers where they have to consciously draw on their legal professional values to inform a difficult decision, often in the heat of battle. For many it will not be a resignation or whistleblowing episode, but rather a quiet, measured moment wherein legal professional values are used to manage risk whilst at the same time maintaining client trust. Sometimes such efforts reach the headlines, but more often than not they occur behind the scenes. They may involve a request to draft legislation to achieve a contentious outcome, unpicking the legal consequences of an embarrassing error, or even advising civil servants on the lawful boundaries of decision-making during Northern Ireland's periods without Ministers. Engaging students with such scenarios helps them to understand that values and professional ethics do not only arise in an exceptional moment of cinematic climax; they are a government lawyer's daily companions and provide a supporting framework for sound advice and wise decision-making.

One of the defining pedagogical choices behind POPL involved integrating these ethical themes into concrete, situational analysis. Rather than treating them as philosophical moral propositions, students encountered them in the form of scenarios where ethical considerations competed with legal and political imperatives in the context of often technical legal rules. For example, recent exercises required students, in the role of a junior government lawyer, to recognise the application of the duty of candour to a politically sensitive but disclosable comment on a stakeholder letter or the application of legal professional privilege to drunkenly indiscreet text messages about a Minister's

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[39] Sir Jonathan Jones, the then-Treasury Solicitor, resigned in September 2020 when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland told the House of Commons that proposed government legislation would deliberately breach international law in a 'specific and limited way'. See Jonathan Jones, 'The Role of the Treasury Solicitor' (2024) 29 Judicial Review 75, 83.

[40] A *New York Times* podcast recently featured a whistleblowing interview with a US government legal professional who described being placed under significant political pressure to mislead the courts. See Rachel Abrams and others, 'A D.O.J. Whistleblower Speaks Out' *The New York Times* (23 July 2025) <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/23/podcasts/the-daily/a-doj-whistleblower-speaks-out.html> accessed 30 August 2025.

conduct from a senior official to the student. Other exercises required them to advise on a course of action that was technically lawful but risked undermining public trust. By situating ethical questions within the realities of risk-based advisory work,[41] the module enabled students to appreciate the complexity of such decisions and to recognise that ethical judgement often involves navigating tensions between competing goods or supporting clients to negotiate difficult situations rather than choosing starkly between right and wrong.

In the debrief sessions that followed these exercises, students were encouraged to articulate the reasoning behind their decisions and to interrogate their own assumptions about the role of a lawyer. This reflective component served to emphasise that professional ethics is as much about developing a disciplined process of reasoning as it is about arriving at any given substantive conclusion. Through guided discussion, it became clear that even when students shared a commitment to the same ethical principles, their application could yield divergent conclusions depending on the weight accorded to different factors. This diversity of reasoned outcomes underscored the point, well established in the literature on legal ethics,[42] that principled disagreement is both possible and legitimate within the bounds of professional conduct.

The inclusion of ethical analysis in the module also served a broader educational purpose, namely to prepare students for the civic responsibilities of public lawyers in democratic systems and the function of both the employed and independent legal professional in upholding public trust in the rule of law, especially in a jurisdiction undergoing a peacebuilding transition such as Northern Ireland's relatively young devolution settlement. Although it was not explored at length in class, the contemporary global concern with democratic backsliding was a tacit backdrop to discussions about professional integrity. In contexts where institutional checks and balances may be under strain, the role of lawyers in upholding legality, transparency, and accountability takes on

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[41] On which, see in particular Ben Yong, 'Risk Management: Government Lawyers and the Provision of Legal Advice within Whitehall' (The Constitution Society 2013). Also see the Attorney General's Guidance on Legal Risk (n 30).

[42] See, eg, Samantha Besson, *The Morality of Conflict: Reasonable Disagreement and the Law* (Hart Publishing 2005).

considerable significance.[43] The simulations and reflective exercises in POPL were therefore framed not only as exercises in professional skill-building, but also as opportunities to consider the universal question of how public lawyers can act as guardians of constitutional governance, even in politically challenging circumstances.

Pedagogical reflections

Systematic student evaluation data were not collected for research purposes in connection with the early iterations of POPL, as prospective ethics approval and participant consent arrangements were not in place at the point of module development and internal review. Accordingly, this section does not report student perception data. Instead, it adopts an autoethnographic perspective which draws primarily on the lead author's teaching notes and reflections.

Pracademic pedagogical initiatives like POPL do not exist in a vacuum. They are shaped by the institutional conditions, political climate, and professional cultures in which they are embedded. For such an initiative to have impact beyond its initial iterations, there is a need to think carefully about how such innovations can be sustained over time, adapted to new contexts, and refined in response to evolving pedagogical challenges. As such, this section focuses on reflections about the factors that influence the longevity and adaptability of novel public law teaching approaches, drawing from the case study while situating its lessons within wider debates about curriculum development, legal education reform, and the role of universities in fostering civic and democratic values.

One of the most significant challenges for sustaining innovative modules lies in institutional support. Modules that rely heavily on pracademic leadership, as was the case here, run the risk of becoming over-dependent on the vision, energy, and networks of a single individual. While that personal commitment can be a major driver of quality and distinctiveness, it also raises questions about succession planning, workload allocation, and the embedding of innovative practices into the broader curriculum. If a module is to develop, and

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[43] See, eg, Scott L Cummings, 'Lawyers in Backsliding Democracy' (2024) 112 California Law Review 513; Felipe Luciano Pires, 'The Legal Profession in the Executive Branch: Lessons from Brazil' (*Verfassungsblog*, 30 July 2025) <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-legal-profession-in-the-executive-branch/> accessed 30 August 2025.

indeed survive changes in personnel, there must be mechanisms for institutionalising its core design principles and maintaining the relationships – both within and beyond the university – that make it effective. For a module like POPL, work is ongoing (including this article) by way of codifying key aspects of its pedagogy, creating a repository of teaching materials that can be adapted over time, and developing mentoring arrangements so that incoming teaching staff can inherit not just content but also the rationale and ethos underpinning the course. This requires the maintenance of relationships at the institutional as well as the individual level.

A further consideration relates to the changing political and legal environment in which public law is taught. In Northern Ireland, the devolution settlement, the implications of Brexit, and ongoing debates about constitutional reform mean that the political landscape is in constant motion. This volatility has clear pedagogical consequences: material that is highly topical one year may require substantial revision the next, and case studies often need to be updated or replaced at short notice. The students also bring to the course their lived experience as citizens within (or international visitors to) the political system they are studying, meaning the course must feel like a valuable and relevant use of their time. The course seeks to maintain a safe, neutral learning space, and the design decision was taken to situate classroom and exam scenarios in 'day-to-day' government issues rather than issues directly related to the conflict in Northern Ireland, and to make the fictional Minister an independent rather than a member of either of the main constitutional blocs. Students are not required to reveal their own political convictions and so the risk is lessened of the legal issues becoming conflated with political ones, while allowing everyone to engage actively with the constitution as a system in ways that will be meaningful if they enter the political world. The teaching provided a context to allow the students to interact with the news as citizens. For example, when there was no functioning Executive in Northern Ireland, POPL teaching centred on the boundaries of civil service decision-making in the absence of Ministers, whereas now that the institutions are restored, attention has shifted to the interplay between policy and legislation, the role of Assembly Committees, and the interactions between Ministers and civil society. The ability to adapt in this way is a strength of a contextually rooted module, but it demands agility and investment on the part of its designers and deliverers. Building flexibility into the curriculum, and framing learning outcomes broadly enough to accommodate shifting political realities, helps sustain coherence while ensuring ongoing relevance.

Another dimension of sustaining innovation lies in fostering ongoing dialogue between the academy and the professions. One of the most distinctive features of POPL was the way it drew on the expertise of practising public lawyers, policy officials, and other external contributors. This not only enriched the students' learning but also ensured that the module's content and approach were informed by the realities of practice. To maintain this, relationships with external partners must be actively nurtured, with mutual benefits made clear. Practitioners gain an opportunity to contribute to the formation of future colleagues, while students gain access to authentic insights that cannot easily be replicated in purely academic settings and to opportunities for work-shadowing or discussing different career options with professionals working in the field. Over time, such collaborations can also evolve to include joint research projects, continuing professional development activities, or shared policy engagement, further embedding the module in a wider ecosystem of public law practice and scholarship.

Sustaining innovation also requires a culture of reflective practice among teaching staff. In the case of POPL, the lead author's reflections, combined with observational input from the co-author, has created a rich base of experiential knowledge about what worked, what could be improved, and how students engaged with different aspects of the module. For example, in reviewing POPL for the purposes of this reflective account, one area for further development became particularly clear, namely that student confidence in oral briefing tasks tends to be uneven. Future iterations will address this by introducing short, structured oral contributions earlier and more frequently, and by building in more systematic feedback after each exercise. Treating formal structures for such reflection – through teaching journals, peer observation, or collaborative scholarship – can help to ensure that such insights are not lost between various iterations of the module. As such, writing about the module, as we do here, is itself part of sustaining its impact.

There is also the question of scaling and adaptation. While the module was designed with the Northern Ireland context in mind, many of its core pedagogical strategies – such as the integration of ethical reasoning, simulated professional exercises, and engagement with live politico-legal issues – could be adapted to other jurisdictions. The challenge is to identify which elements are context-specific and which are transferable. The first objective of POPL, transferring knowledge about the legal rules governing young constitutional institutions in a small jurisdiction where not all legal doctrine is reduced to

easily-accessible writing, is specific to Northern Ireland, although applicable to other small or transitional states. The second objective, of involving experiential as well as doctrinal learning in order to prepare students for ethically complex, politically sensitive work is applicable in most jurisdictions. The precise professional pathways into public law may differ, but applying a holistic Carnegie approach to the formation of the knowledge, skills and values of future generations of public lawyers has resonance far beyond this small jurisdiction.

Finally, sustaining and developing innovation requires an openness to evolution. No module can or should remain static. The most successful pedagogical innovations are those that can adapt not only to external change but also to shifts in educational theory, student expectations, and technological possibilities. For POPL, in particular as the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland governmental sector begins to routinise the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in its work,[44] this will mean exploring ways of integrating AI tools safely and ethically so as to enhance simulation exercises. It may also mean rethinking assessment strategies to capture a broader range of student skills and this will evolve as the wider university sector develops assessment methods which take AI into account. Diversifying the range of external voices involved in delivery is another evolving area, such as giving students in the past academic year the opportunity to compare the approach and stance of guest speakers from the Bar whose practice focuses primarily on private and on public sector clients. The key is to remain anchored in the module's central tenets – ethical integrity, contextual sensitivity, and professional preparedness – while being willing to experiment with new methods of achieving them. These considerations point to a more cumulative truth, namely that sustaining innovation in pracademic public law pedagogy is not a matter of preserving a fixed set of practices, but of embedding a dynamic, reflective, and outward-looking approach to teaching. This requires commitment not only from individual educators but also from the institutions and professional communities within which they work. In this sense, the contribution of a module like POPL is not just in the learning it imparts to its students, but in the example it sets for how public law

[44] See for example the Government Digital Service's *Artificial Intelligence Playbook for the UK Government* (February 2025) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-playbook-for-the-uk-government/artificial-intelligence-playbook-for-the-uk-government-html> accessed 18 September 2025.

can be taught – creatively, contextually, and with an unwavering commitment to the values that underpin the legal profession in a democratic society.

Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this article has sought to draw together several strands of thought, observation, and experience into a coherent account of how public law can be taught in ways that are both deeply rooted in the realities of constitutional governance and yet attentive to the demands of scholarly rigour. An advanced undergraduate course on *The Practice of Public Law in Northern Ireland* has served as the focal point for this exploration, offering an unusually rich site in which to examine the intersections between pracademia, experiential learning, and the development of ethical sensibilities. It has been shown that the module's design and delivery arose from a complex interplay between the lead author's own professional background, the institutional and jurisdictional specificities of Northern Ireland, and a lifetime of engagement with international frameworks such as the Carnegie Report on *Educating Lawyers* and the IBA's *International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession*.[45] In so doing, the paper has sought to situate the POPL module within a wider discourse about the purposes, methods, and future directions of public law education.

At its core, this project has been driven by the conviction that public law cannot be fully understood or effectively taught if it is divorced from the political, administrative, and ethical contexts in which it operates. The POPL module's sustained engagement with real-world public law problems, drawn from the experience of those who have worked at the centre of government, has provided students with a form of learning that adds to the doctrinalism that can characterise traditional legal education. In this way, our case study challenges the often assumed dichotomy between academic and practical knowledge, demonstrating how each can enrich the other when brought into measured conversation.

In essence, this paper has attempted to bridge three relatively under-connected areas of thought: the scholarship on clinical legal education, which has tended to neglect the specificities of lawyering when advising government; the

[45] Sullivan and others (n 2); 'IBA International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession' (n 4).

growing body of work on pracademia, which has been entirely silent on public law from a governmental point of view; and the role of lawyers in safeguarding democratic governance, which is not routinely linked to pedagogical strategies, unless from a civil society perspective. By bringing these domains into dialogue, and by grounding that dialogue in a contextualised example, the article offers both conceptual and practical insights that have relevance beyond the jurisdictional confines of Northern Ireland. It invites public law educators elsewhere to consider how their own teaching might be reimagined in light of the tensions and possibilities revealed by a pracademic approach.

The methodological framing of this study has been equally central to its contribution. By adopting a form of reflective, situated analysis that draws on elements of autoethnography without collapsing into autobiography, the paper has illustrated how pracademic positionality can be mobilised as a resource for scholarly inquiry. This is not without its challenges – questions of generalisability, of potential bias, and of the balance between personal narrative and critical analysis must all be navigated carefully. However, as demonstrated here, such an approach can yield insights that are difficult to access through more detached forms of research. It allows the complex texture of cross-institutional life, the subtleties of pedagogical decision-making, and the lived experience of professional ethics to be recorded in scholarly literature in ways that illuminate the issues involved.

From a practical perspective, the paper offers a set of considerations for those seeking to design or revise public law curricula. These include the value of integrating authentic, jurisdiction-specific materials; the importance of modelling ethical decision-making processes; the pedagogical benefits of foregrounding the political and institutional contexts of legal rules; and the need to strike a balance between doctrinal competence and broader professional formation. While the specifics will vary across jurisdictions, the underlying principles are widely transferable. Educators in other contexts might, for example, draw on their own professional experiences or on collaborations with local practitioners to create similarly situated learning experiences, adapting the scale and focus to their own institutional constraints.

Lastly, this study underscores the importance of recognising legal education as a site of ongoing negotiation between competing imperatives: between the academic and the vocational, the local and the global, the theoretical and the

practical.[46] The POPL module represents one possible resolution of those tensions – one that draws on pracademic insight, honours the disciplinary depth of public law scholarship, and highlights the ethical responsibilities of the legal profession. It is hoped that documenting and analysing this example might prompt reflection among public law educators elsewhere. The central premise of our shared challenges is clear: to prepare students for the practice of public law in the real world, our curricula must engage directly with the interaction between law, politics, and ethics. Pracademic pedagogy offers a distinctive means of meeting that challenge.

[46] See too Matthew Atkinson and Ben Livings, 'Emerging Themes in CLE Pedagogy: Where to Next?' in Matthew Atkinson and Ben Livings (eds), *Contemporary Challenges in Clinical Legal Education: Role, Function and Future Directions* (Routledge 2023).