

The 10th Annual YPAI Seminar was held in the Gaffney Room, Distillery Building, Church Street in Dublin on Thursday the 21st of November 2024. The seminar offered an opportunity for practitioners with an interest in international arbitration to engage in lively discussions with top practitioners from around Europe. The event was attended by participants from Ireland, the UK, the US and Asia.

Panel 1: Panel Discussion: Journeys in International Arbitration

The opening panel was chaired by Niall Buckley SC of the Bar of Ireland. This panel considered the different career paths of the speakers, the challenges they faced, and the insights they gained along the way.

Sarah Morreau (Senior Associate, A&O Shearman, London) appreciated that international arbitration provides the opportunity to both prepare written briefs and advocate which one might not find in other fields. Sarah emphasised the value of networking in the legal field, and the importance of knowing the market and building a network of peers who, when the time arises, will call upon you.

At first, when commencing her career in international arbitration, Sarah was taken aback by the competence and experience of international arbitration practitioners. She soon realised she had ample experience to bring to the table, something she wished she had realised earlier.

Laragh Lee (Deputy Counsel, International Court of Arbitration, Paris) shared how her interest in international arbitration developed during her solicitor training with Arthur Cox. She was impressed by the flexibility, access to resources, and efficiency of the process. After qualifying in Ireland, she moved to Paris and commenced working with the ICC, Paris. While acknowledging that breaking into the ICC's career path can be challenging, Laragh encouraged young professionals to persevere. Speaking about how it can be particularly tricky for new arbitrators to get 'their first dispute', Laragh highlighted the ICC's efforts to diversify its pool of arbitrators, noting that it often selects first-time arbitrators for smaller, less complex disputes as part of this initiative.

Laragh mentioned how the ICC's policy of formally inviting parties to consider diversity when appointing arbitrators has contributed to a 5% increase in female arbitrator appointments at the ICC since 2022 – a remarkable result from such a simple initiative.

Philippa Charles (Twenty Essex, London) spoke about being impressed with the efficiency of the field of international arbitration in particular in contrast to litigation before the Courts in London at that time. Philippa spoke about diversity emerging in the sector since the commencement of her career. She acknowledged the significance of 'The Pledge', now five years old, in nudging firms towards greater diversity, and how it triggered regional pledges in areas such as Africa and India.

Philippa acknowledged that each career decision should be based on individual circumstances. However, she noted that exposure to cultural differences can be a real asset in international arbitration, and also pointed out that Irish lawyers tend to make a positive impression, which can be beneficial in building international networks.

Catherine Gilfedder (Partner, Dentons, London) reflected on how her early interest in public law led to her international arbitration, a field that allowed her to engage with her interest in geopolitics, foreign languages, and cultures. She explained that international arbitration was the area of private practice where these interests aligned. Catherine described her career path as 'traditional'; she trained at a firm with an international arbitration department, worked in Paris for six months, and then qualified in London into a litigation and international arbitration team. Catherine spoke about the collegial atmosphere within international arbitration and drawing particular inspiration from her supervisor during her traineeship, who was also a judge at the International Criminal Court.

Catherine advised that it's never too early to start building a network. Establishing relationships with clients and colleagues is crucial, as you never know when a contact might end up on the other side of a work-giver!

Panel 2: Fireside chat with Susan Ahern SC, the Bar of Ireland

Moderated by Gerard James (Partner, William Fry LLP)

Attendees were treated to a fireside chat with Susan Ahern SC, moderated by Gerard James Partner with William Fry LLP. Susan began by sharing her roots in Tipperary and studying Law at Trinity College Dublin. Susan explained how sport was a huge part of her life from a young age. In fact, Susan hadn't planned to pursue a legal career at all — instead dreaming of becoming a P.E. teacher, driven by her love of sport, athletics, and volleyball. However, during her fifth year of secondary school, she tried her hand at debating, and despite being nervous at first, she ended up really enjoying it. After finishing university, Susan spent five years working in the banking industry, where she had her first introduction to international arbitration in the form of ISDAs containing LCIA arbitration clauses.

In 2001, when World Rugby moved its headquarters to Ireland, Susan saw an opportunity to combine her two passions. She became legal counsel during a period of significant change in sports governance at the time, the sports law industry was small, and she was one of only two sports lawyers in Ireland. The work was diverse—one day drafting contracts, the next sitting on a sports tribunal panel.

Susan recalled how, during the Six Nations, player Joe Marler used discriminatory language towards Samson Lee. Although the Six Nations had its own disciplinary structure, Marler wasn't cited, and the issue wasn't properly addressed. World Rugby stepped in, brought a misconduct case against Marler, and eventually issued a fine – in the process setting a new precedent for misconduct standards in rugby. It was a significant moment for Susan and her team, who had demonstrated how World Rugby's intervention could make a difference in these kinds of matters.

Speaking on her decision to leave World Rugby, Susan took the decision to return to the Bar of Ireland, a move that wasn't easy after already having an established career. Susan spoke about how challenging it was to start devilling at this point in her career, but she saw it as an important step in her professional journey.

When asked about her move into international arbitration, Susan shared how she began sitting on sports tribunal panels, including at the Beijing and London Olympics, covering areas like equestrian sports and sailing challenges. She recalled her first hearing, where she sat as a decision-maker, with senior and junior counsel, as well as instructing solicitors, all presenting their cases before her, and how, when the decision was delivered and not appealed, she knew international arbitration was for her. Susan emphasised that one of the best ways to gain experience in international arbitration is by getting involved in sports tribunals, and how these are *pro bono*, and so provide a great opportunity for budding arbitrators to build their skills in decision-making.