

The project began with an amazing trip to London, which proved to be much better than my previous visits as a tourist. During the trip, we were provided with opportunities to talk to judges (both sitting and retired), lawyers and probation officers. We saw for ourselves how courts and police stations look on the inside, how they operate.

The trip was followed by a series of seminars in St. Petersburg.

First, it should be said that the British legal system is significantly ahead of the legal system of the Russian Federation. Most of the innovations that are gradually embraced by our legal system are borrowed from the legal systems of the UK, EU and the US. And this is why this project was a good opportunity to learn from people coming from a more developed legal system, while also being able to share some of our own experiences with them.

I will point out several things that impressed me over the course of this project:

1. The way England succeeded in transforming its law enforcement and judiciary systems into something that can truly be called a legal system.
2. National Probation Service. As of yet, there is no analogy to this service in Russia. Generally speaking, this service reforms an individual when he or she becomes a suspect, and later in court and after the trial. Its main purpose is to give a person a chance to go back to being a normal member of the society.
3. I was surprised to know that a great number of judges in England are former defence lawyers. It is even possible to combine working as an advocate and a part time judge.
4. Many interesting ethics-related issues were covered, for instance the issue of communicating with a client in the right way, i.e. providing proper help while maintaining a certain distance.
5. I was pleasantly surprised to learn about the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC). If I remember correctly, it was said that 47 percent of families the court works with go back to normal life. Even though it's less than a half, it's scary to even think about the Russian statistics. Sadly, we don't have such courts.
6. Each police station has a custody officer. In England, the criminal procedure is regulated in a much more detailed and articulate manner, compared to Russia, which gives all the involved parties a clear understanding of what might happen in each particular situation, and makes it much easier to identify violations.

In terms of practical use of the knowledge acquired during the project, I have discussed things that I learnt with my colleagues who didn't participate in the training, and they were really interested in what I had to say. They were impressed and said that we should also aspire to have a legal system like they have in England and Wales.

I have also discussed these issues with Russian police officers and members of the Prosecution service. To my surprise, they seemed to envy the UK and even said something like "I wish we had it too, we're so fed up with our situation..." This means that people who work in our system understand the difference between "the way things are" and "the way things should be" and somewhere deep inside they want the system to change for the better.

Another great thing about this project is that I have met so many new and interesting people, some of whom have already become my friends.