



## Editorial: Web JCLI Legal Education Special Issue 2009

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Readers will no doubt remember the legal education issue of this journal published in April 2008 following the Society of Legal Scholars' conference 2007. This followed on from the first such edition published under the editorship of Ruth Soetendorp and Maureen Spencer in 2006. Such has been the success of these legal education special issues that we have again been kindly supported in producing this edition by Tony Bradney and Fiona Cownie, before we bow out as Convenor and Deputy Convenor of the legal education section in September.

The 2009 conference will see the Society celebrate its centenary and a key theme of this year will be reflecting on one hundred years of legal scholarship and exploring the possible future for legal education. The papers in this collection offer a glimpse at some of the contemporary issues facing law schools.

We would like to thank not only Tony and Fiona but all those who contributed to the success of the stream at the 2008 conference and throughout our terms as convenor and deputy convenor.

### Legal Scholarship

The theme of last year's conference was 'The impact of legal scholarship'. As Gary Watt says in his article 'The Soul of Legal Education' law schools have over the years become adept at assembling the bare bones of law degrees. But what room does this give for the development of legal scholarship? The law degree should surely be about far more than the development of a series of 'Stepford Lawyers' ready to join the serried ranks of the legal profession. It would indeed be wrong to believe that the two are not interdependent. Indeed, increasingly we see the work of legal scholars referred to by the judiciary.

Looking to the future however, the Nuffield Inquiry of 2006 paints a rather grim portrait of the current state of our law schools in relation to the development of legal scholarship (Genn et al 2006). It suggests that for a variety of reasons, law schools are forced to focus on delivering the basics of legal education and rather fail to add the flesh of scholarship. Julian Webb in his editorial for the Spring 2007 edition of 'Directions' takes issue with some of this. He refers to the works of Twining (1995) and Cownie (2004) which, he says, express the belief that there is indeed an integration and normalization of socio-legal approaches within the academy. He goes on to say, however, that despite offering little in the way of concrete advice we should take the opportunity afforded by the publication of the report seriously. The development of legal scholarship is essential to the health of the Academy and must be taken into account in developing the day to day practices of the law school.

Whilst there is clearly no room for complacency the range of papers given at the 2008 conference in the legal education stream alone would appear to indicate that there is indeed a good deal of scholarship taking place. In other streams research will revolve around the specific subject areas of law. Scholarship in legal education has had a tough time of it; not least in regard to its recognition by the RAE. However, it continues to grow both in volume and in the scholarly quality of the work produced. It is no longer the Cinderella of the law school and, as the papers produced here will demonstrate, has much to contribute to the impact of legal scholarship.

## Papers

Thirteen papers were delivered at the 2008 conference. Covering a wide range of issues, all were of potential interest and significance to the development of scholarship in legal education. We are lucky enough to be able to feature three articles based on those papers in this edition.

Firstly we have a piece by Mark O'Brien (University of the West of England). His article, 'Collegiality and Change in Legal Education: A Case of Herding Cats?' examines the nature of 'change' within the legal academy in the context of the organisational bureaucracy. He argues that law schools are increasingly subject to outside forces of change and appear to be in a state of flux in which change seemingly 'has to' happen.

Graham Ferris suggests that 'We Should Look to Legal Theory to Inform the Teaching of Substantive Law', arguing that the legal curriculum should be guided by a purpose or set of purposes and that legal theory can serve as an important tool in achieving this.

Finally, Chris Ashford examines legal education in law firms: 'Legal Education in Practice: An Initial Survey'. This paper explores the findings from a small survey of law firms to examine the extent and nature of legal education now being offered in UK law firms.

We very much hope that you find these pieces as interesting as we have.

## References

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