

Editorial

It is an honour to assume responsibility for *Legal Studies*, described to us as ‘the jewel in the crown’ of the Society of Legal Scholars when we were informed that we had been successful in our bid to be its editors. We would like to thank the Society for entrusting us with the editorship. We appreciate the way the Society positions the journal at the heart of its endeavours, reflected in the inclusion of the editors as members of the executive. Any honour is closely followed by responsibility which, in the context of this particular editorial role, takes many interlinked forms. First, we owe a responsibility to the Society to ensure that *Legal Studies* continues to perform its key role as one of the foremost academic law journals in the common law world; a journal with an international readership and one that pushes the boundaries of legal scholarship while reflecting the diversity and depth of learning that can be found among our readership.

Second, we owe a responsibility to our readers to ensure that they continue to go to the journal to discover the current and ever-changing boundaries of scholarship. We aim to ensure that *Legal Studies* will continue to challenge readers intellectually across a broad range of fields reflecting the diversity of approaches and methodologies that is now characteristic of legal scholarship in the common law world. The fact that members of the Society continue to receive a copy of the journal on their desks four times a year makes this responsibility all the greater. Through its place within the Society, as well as its commitment to publishing original work across all areas of law, *Legal Studies* has become a rare and important window through which we can access intellectually rigorous articles across the whole spectrum of legal discourse in a single journal. Its role as a general law journal is all the more significant given the increasing specialisation of scholarship and resultant proliferation and fragmentation of legal journals. We are committed to continuing the generalist nature of the journal, encouraging academics from a wide range of fields and methodologies to submit their best work to us for consideration. Our ambition is that the articles we publish will both challenge the specialist—raising new agendas and interrogating received orthodoxies and how they have developed—and engage the general reader. Thus, one of the particular challenges for the journal is to ensure that both generalist and specialist audiences are satisfied. This requires that authors show sophistication and the facility to elucidate their field for the general reader, while also challenging experts in the field by providing new and provocative insights.

As editors we also owe a responsibility to our authors. This has a substantive and a functional dimension. Substantively, we are committed to ensuring that we publish the best articles we receive, drawing on the expertise of our reviewers in that regard. To ensure quality, every article is assessed in the first instance by the editorial board to ensure that it is appropriate to send it out for review on the basis of quality and fit with the journal. Each article that meets this minimum threshold is anonymised and sent to two equally anonymous reviewers who ideally return their comments within a six week window, after which the editors make a decision. Two reviews will be sought even if it means there is a delay due to a reviewer not being able to meet the suggested 6 week time frame for review. Functionally we aim for a 10 week turnaround, although it is not always possible to realise this. As well as recognising the benefits of being delivered in hard copy to members every quarter, *Legal Studies* also embraces

electronic mechanisms to make our submission and production processes as efficient as possible. To this end the journal is now using Manuscript Central, an electronic submission system that streamlines the submission, editorial and review process. In addition, once an article is accepted and prepared for publication, the journal benefits from 'early view' (an online version of record published before inclusion in an issue). This early view system of the final version of the article ensures that authors' views are available to a readership at the earliest possible moment in what is a fairly protracted publishing process. We also are mindful of our responsibility to bring the journal to as wide an audience as possible; well beyond the more than 3000 members of the Society. In this regard, we were delighted to receive notice that SCOPUS—the largest abstract and citation database of research literature and quality web sources covering nearly 18,000 titles from more than 5000 publishers – now includes the journal. We will continue to work with our publishers and the Society to ensure the widest possible coverage of *Legal Studies*, in particular through electronic databases so that it is brought to the widest possible audience.

There is a second category of authors to whom we owe a responsibility: those who write book reviews for the journal. These authors provide a particular service both to those whose books they review and to the readership of *Legal Studies*. We see reviews as an important means of engaging in critique and of identifying trends in scholarship. Thus, in addition to the short reviews that can be a pleasure to write and to read, the book review section will also now publish longer reviews to allow for further development of ideas and engagement. This will at times include review essays covering a number of titles. Although the proliferation of information sources online and elsewhere might suggest that a book review section is no longer necessary, we are of the view that both the range of scholarly books being published and the nature of *Legal Studies* as the journal of a learned society require the continued publication of book reviews. We will continue, therefore, to approach people to act as book reviewers as well as welcoming approaches from those who are interested in acting as reviewers for the journal.

We would like to recast our responsibility to our peer reviewers as a debt; one that will never be directly repaid. One of the privileges of this role is that we get to see at first hand the collegiality, commitment to the advancement of knowledge and scholarly engagement that underpins the life of the legal academic. We see reviewers (well over 100 since we first began the takeover from our predecessors in May last year) tirelessly giving of their time and expertise to write reflective reviews for which they will never receive named acknowledgement and which serve so often to greatly enhance the quality of a paper. The good review not only makes a judgment call as to whether or not the piece is publishable (subject to major or minor revisions, after resubmission or, perhaps, not at all), but often does so after a wonderfully considered commentary on the paper. While UK academics necessarily focus on the REF, it is all too easy to forget the rich community of unsung heroes that are the reviewers of journal articles. We are grateful to those reviewers who have already responded to our requests and to the hundreds more we will need to call on during our tenure.

Finally, we owe a responsibility to our predecessors in this role and, in particular, our immediate predecessors. We draw inspiration from their vision in ensuring that the journal thrived as a general law journal even while academic scholarship continued to diversify and specialise. Due to their hard work, submission rates to *Legal Studies* are extremely healthy. We are the largest editorial team that the journal has ever had, although a team of four seems about right given the volume of articles received on a weekly basis. As editors, we aim to maintain and build on the success

of our predecessors in order to ensure that the journal continues to grow in influence and impact among the legal academic communities in the common law world and Europe and, as a result, among practitioner and policy communities. On a pragmatic note, we are immensely grateful to Rob Merkin, Jill Poole and Jenny Steele for the smoothness of the transition and their advice and patience as we learnt the ropes. In that all too familiar phrase, we only stand on the shoulders of others in this task. Our publishers, Wiley-Blackwell and the Society executive have similarly facilitated the transition and been responsive to our many requests for information.

While these responsibilities are diverse, our fulfilment of them is informed by the values that we bring to the journal as an editorial team: intellectual curiosity, integrity, openness, transparency and a willingness to engage with all forms of scholarship that demonstrate rigour, originality coherence, consistency and the all important requirement of being of interest to a general readership. We are privileged to occupy a unique position in UK and Irish scholarship as editors of this journal, seeing through this role the wealth of scholarship, the range of the discipline, and the emergence of new scholars. We look forward to expanding the intellectual horizons of our readership during our tenure.

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