

Legal Studies

Editorial

This issue of *Legal Studies*, the journal of the Society of Legal Scholars (SLS), represents a double first. It is the first issue to appear under the new editorial team of Rob Merkin, Jenny Steele and Nick Wikeley at the University of Southampton, with Jill Poole of the University of West of England taking on the mantle of Book Reviews Editor. It is also the first issue to appear under the imprint of the Society's new publishers, Blackwell Publishing.

As the new editors we are very conscious that the SLS has entrusted us with its flagship journal and of the responsibilities that this entails. As a result of the commitment and flair of successive editors, *Legal Studies* is now recognised as one of the leading generalist law journals in the UK with a growing international readership. This readership will certainly expand with the greater online profile instigated by Blackwell for the current issue. The roots of *Legal Studies* lie in the *Journal of the Society of Public Teachers of Law*, which appeared in two series (1924–1938 and 1947–1980 under the editorships of Professors HF Jolowicz, FH Lawson and JA Jolowicz, respectively). The Society of Public Teachers of Law (or SPTL, as the SLS was then known) decided to launch *Legal Studies* in 1981 with the goal of establishing it as 'an important academic journal in the common law world' (Editorial (1981) 1 LS 1). In particular, the avowed aim of *Legal Studies* was 'to publish contributions distinguished by their scholarship and, so far as is reasonably possible, by having a more general rather than a specialist interest' (Editorial (1993) 13 LS, no page number). This mission has served the journal well over the last 25 years under the distinguished editorships of Professor John Andrews (1981–1993), Professor John Bell (1994–1998) and Professors Derek Morgan and Celia Wells (1999–2005).

The contours of legal research and scholarship today are very different to those of 25 years ago. In 1980 doctrinal scholarship was still very much the dominant force in legal academia, although the empirical study of law and other forms of socio-legal research were beginning to establish their credentials. In our view, doctrinal legal scholarship retains a central place in academic law, but conceptual and theoretical perspectives on law have multiplied, while socio-legal research has grown in importance. Newer methodologies (including feminist legal theory and inter-disciplinary work) are no longer marginal to academic law but have forced their way into the mainstream. Although 'diversity' is a term that is possibly overused – it is, for example, the current buzzword in official policy on judicial appointments – we intend

that *Legal Studies* will continue to reflect the full diversity of contemporary legal scholarship. In his 1994 editorial, John Bell emphasised that this journal 'does not restrict its choice of material save by the criteria of scholarly merit and legal interest' ((1994) 14 LS i). We propose to maintain that policy and will seek to produce a journal which is relevant to the entire membership of SLS. We recognise that in the past 25 years legal academics have become increasingly specialised, as have legal practitioners. Nevertheless, our aspiration is to produce a journal in which there is something of value and interest to everyone in each issue. Our own interests, as an editorial team, span a very broad range from the most commercial fields of law, through conceptual and theoretical perspectives, to socio-legal studies and policy perspectives. We are excited to be working together in maintaining *Legal Studies* as a truly generalist academic legal journal.

We have set ourselves a number of other goals for our 5-year term of editorship. As with our predecessors, we will encourage those who are relatively new to academia to publish in *Legal Studies*. The journal has never been, and should not become, the preserve of a select few, but keeps its doors open to high quality scholarship from all sources. We also hope to attract more contributions from overseas, and especially from elsewhere in the common law world, reflecting a growing interest in comparative dimensions of law. All in all, we hope both to consolidate and enhance the strong reputation of *Legal Studies* which our predecessors have secured.

There are two other matters relating to the editorship which we wish to mention. First, we are particularly indebted to Derek Morgan and Celia Wells for their help in ensuring such a smooth transition as the journal migrated from Cardiff to Southampton. We and the Society owe them both a great debt, not least as they faced the added difficulty in 2005 of editing the journal when it was 'between publishers'. Given the lead-in times for publication in a journal such as this, there are inevitably several articles in this and the next issue – including, to our delight, two contributions from colleagues at Southampton – which we have been happy to 'inherit' from the outgoing editors. We are also delighted that Celia Wells's role in the wider work of the Society will continue with her Presidency of SLS in 2006–2007. Secondly, we should also pay tribute to the hard work of Professor Tony Prosser (of the University of Bristol) in his capacity as Book Reviews Editor for the journal over recent years. The policy of seeking out reviewers who can provide expert, balanced and informed commentary on new books will be maintained.

As indicated at the outset, this is also the first issue of *Legal Studies* to appear under the Blackwell banner. For its first 25 years, the journal was published by Butterworths (now LexisNexis UK), and the Society is grateful to the company for its generous support over the years in establishing *Legal Studies* as a leading rank legal periodical. LexisNexis UK ended their association with *Legal Studies* at the end of 2004, following their decision to focus their efforts in the UK in the practitioner market. The Society published *Legal Studies* itself in 2005, on an interim basis and through a sub-contracting arrangement, and is grateful to the sterling work of the outgoing Honorary Treasurer, Professor Keith Stanton, in guiding it through this difficult period. The Society invited bids to publish *Legal Studies* from a number of leading legal publishers, which were then subject to intensive scrutiny from the Society's officers, with the invaluable assistance of a publishing consultant. The Society took the view that the tender submitted by Blackwell offered the best deal in terms of taking *Legal Studies* forward. Although the basic format of the journal will remain the same, we are planning a number of new initiatives in conjunction with Blackwell. For example, *Legal Studies* will reach a much wider readership both here

and abroad through Blackwell's online Synergy service. We are also actively exploring an online submission system which we believe will provide a better service to contributors and referees alike.

From volume 26 we are adopting two new services which will be of particular benefit to authors: OnlineEarly and Author Services. Articles will now be published on a regular basis online in advance of their appearance in a print issue. These articles are fully peer reviewed, edited and complete – they only lack page numbers and volume/issue details – and are considered fully published from the date they first appear online. This date is shown with the article in the online table of contents on Blackwell Synergy. Because OnlineEarly articles are considered fully complete, please bear in mind that changes cannot be made to an article after the online publication date, even if it is still yet to appear in print.

To view all the articles currently available, please visit the journal homepage on <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/lest> and simply click on the 'OnlineEarly' area at the top of the list of issues available to view. On print publication, the article will be removed from the OnlineEarly area and will appear instead in the relevant online issue, complete with page numbers and volume/issue details. No other changes will be made. The articles are available as full text HTML or PDF and can be cited as references by using their Digital Object Identifier (DOI) numbers. For more information on DOIs, please see <http://www.doi.org/faq.html>.

The implementation of OnlineEarly for *Legal Studies* represents our commitment to get manuscripts available to view to the academic community as quickly as possible, reducing time to publication considerably without sacrificing quality or completeness.

Author Services enables authors to track their article – once it has been accepted – through the production process to publication online and in print. Authors can check the status of their articles online and choose to receive automated emails at key stages of production. The author will receive an email with a unique link that enables them to register and have their article automatically added to the system.

We look forward to taking *Legal Studies* forward with Blackwell over the next 5 years.

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