

## The Irish Association of Law Teachers

The Irish Association of Law Teachers (IALT) is a distinctive organisation in Ireland in a number of respects. First, since its inception in 1979, it has been an all-island organisation bringing together legal academics and teachers of law from both sides of the border. Second, it is committed to furthering excellence in legal education and research through conferences, research projects and acting as a collective voice for law teachers.

The association launched its new brand, logo and website at its 30th anniversary seminar held in Trinity College Dublin on the 26 February. The three speakers, Professor Blanaid Clarke (UCD), Professor Brice Dickson (QUB) and Professor Paul McCutcheon (UL) gave fascinating and thought-provoking papers on the change in the nature of legal scholarship in the last 30 years, and gave some interesting, if chilling, thoughts on the role of legal scholarship in the university in the next 30 years. The council also launched prizes which reflect the dual activities of the association – law teaching and legal scholarship – details of which are available on the website.

The council will continue the tradition of holding an annual conference this year. It will take place in Limerick on the weekend of 26 November. Details and a call for papers will be circulated in due course. The first winner of the IALT book prize will also be announced at the conference.

Details of the IALT, its council and its activities are all available on its new website [www.ialt.ie](http://www.ialt.ie). We can be contacted at [info@ialt.ie](mailto:info@ialt.ie), or contact the president directly at [jennifer.schweppe@ul.ie](mailto:jennifer.schweppe@ul.ie). We hope to see you at a forthcoming IALT event!

*Jennifer Schweppe, President, IALT 2009-10*

## MSc/LLM criminology and criminal justice

Advanced studies in criminology and criminal justice can be pursued as either MSc or LLM at University College Dublin. To earn the degree students are required to complete 60 credits of coursework as well as a dissertation. Applications for admission to these stimulating and demanding programmes, involving intensive learning in small groups, are invited from anyone with an excellent degree in sociology, law, politics, psychology, history or another subject relevant to criminology. Further information on application procedures and admission requirements is available from [lawpostgraduate@ucd.ie](mailto:lawpostgraduate@ucd.ie).

## Law Commission 11th Programme

Anyone can propose any area of the law in need of reform for the Law Commission to consider for its 11th programme of law reform. Projects are likely to focus on issues that: are systemic; are caused by laws or policies that are complex or hard to understand; have widespread discriminatory impact or cause disproportionate costs; or arise from laws or policies that are inconsistent with modern standards. In view of the current economic situation, projects that support the drive to reduce waste and inefficiency are of particular interest. The consultation closes on **15 October 2010**. Visit the Law Commission website for full details. [www.lawcom.org.uk/questionnaire/](http://www.lawcom.org.uk/questionnaire/).

## Bee biosecurity

Dr Opi Outhwaite received research funding for the project 'Legal frameworks for honey bee biosecurity and conservation'. In light of declining honey bee populations, the introduction in 2009 of DEFRA's Healthy Bee plan and the broader issues of protection of pollinator services, this project will analyse the extent to which legal and regulatory provisions in the UK enable objectives for halting honey bee loss to be achieved. The project includes an empirical component focusing on the experience of beekeepers and bee inspectors. Enquiries to [o.m.outhwaite@greenwich.ac.uk](mailto:o.m.outhwaite@greenwich.ac.uk).

*Opi Outhwaite*

## Politicising law, judicialising politics

The Foundation for Law, Justice and Society annual lecture in law and society was held at Magdalen College on Thursday 20 May 2010, in collaboration with the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies (CSLS), Oxford.

The lecture was given by the renowned constitutional scholar Professor Ran Hirschl, of Toronto University, who advocated a realist approach to the current trend towards constitutional supremacy. Professor Hirschl, whose work has been described as 'pathbreaking, compelling, and iconoclastic', argued that, whilst the recent decades have seen a huge increase in the political importance of constitutional courts worldwide, this trend should not necessarily be perceived as a reflection of progressive social or political change, or the result of societies' or politicians' celebration of human rights. Rather, a realist analysis would indicate that constitutionalism of this kind is 'politics by other means' and a mechanism for governments to strengthen their grip on power. It is no coincidence that they empower constitutional courts particularly at times when this power is threatened, staffing the courts with government-friendly judges as part of a deliberate political strategy. In a wide-ranging lecture, Professor Hirschl addressed an array of real-world examples of the political construction of judicial review and examined how strategic reliance on constitutional courts may help governments mediate hotly contested political issues.

The lecture was followed the next day by a workshop in which a roundtable of constitutional and legal experts conducted a comparative analysis of the constitutional development of five countries to assess how the social and political conditions of the time impact on constitution-making.

The workshop opened with an analysis of the extraordinary level of political compliance shown by the constitutional court of Japan, having struck down only eight statutes since its creation in 1947, despite having a docket as large as the US Supreme Court. Dr David Erdos from the CSLS then provided an account of the reform to the New Zealand Constitution as a response to the breakdown of the social welfare state, introducing the idea of aversive constitutionalism to describe constitutional reform brought in specifically to prevent a particular course of events from recurring. Nigeria provided another interesting case study of a state grappling with both the imposition of a Westminster system, the consequent politicisation of the military, and the twin curse of oil wealth and deep ethnic division, which served to severely undermine the strength of the constitution.

Professor David Robertson from the University of Oxford, in his presentation on the French constitution, endeavoured to redress the prevailing thesis that constitutional reform occurs in response to 'big bang' moments of political and democratic change, stressing that constitutional law more often works incrementally, through rather mundane decisions. Finally, the case of Portugal was examined as an exemplar of a constitution promulgated in 1976 which enshrines socio-economic rights to an almost unprecedented degree, as a result of the prevailing political, religious and societal factors operating at the time.

The papers from the workshop are expected to form part of a forthcoming book on the social and political foundations of constitutions, further details of which will be made available over the coming months.

An audio podcast of Professor Hirschl's lecture is available at [www.fljs.org/Hirschl](http://www.fljs.org/Hirschl).

*Phil Dines*

## Pre-nuptial agreements

Anne Barlow (law) and Janet Smithson (Psychology), University of Exeter, have been awarded £104,693 by the Nuffield Foundation for an inter-disciplinary project looking at public attitudes to pre-nuptial agreements and their implications for family law in England and Wales.

*Anne Barlow*