

ALT Committee Report 2002-2003

The ALT Committee met four times during the year and at the annual conference in Maastricht. Looking over the minutes of the meetings much of the business of the committee is taken up with organisation of conferences, liaison with publishers and communication with members. However, there have been a few particular issues which the committee has dealt with this year.

Vice-President

I was delighted to be able to announce at the annual conference in Maastricht that Joe Thomson, Regius Professor at the University of Glasgow and Scottish Law Commissioner, had accepted the invitation from Sir Robin Jacob, our President, to join the Association as a Vice-President, alongside Professor Paul Dobson. Professor Thomson is well known to delegates to the annual conference, where he has regularly contributed stimulating conference papers. He also delivered the annual Upjohn lecture in 1997 and was the President of the then SPTL (now SLS) during 2000-01.

Upjohn lecture

The 2002 annual Upjohn lecture was delivered by Lord Reed, who is a Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland. Lord Reed was the youngest person ever to be appointed to the Scottish bench and regularly acts as a judge in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). He was in fact on the bench which heard the challenge brought before the ECHR by Jon Thomson and Robert Venables. His speech on the confidentiality of jury deliberations was very well received and was reported widely in the national press the following day it made the front page of The Herald and generated leader comment in the same issue.

Membership

The membership database was deemed to be due for a spring clean, as some names on the database had moved, retired or in some cases even died. This turned out to be a fairly onerous task, involving the membership secretary, the treasurer and the administrator. The result gave a clearer picture of who are paid up members of the ALT, but work has still to be done to bring the database completely up to date. We appreciate the help given by members in providing information and will be attempting to contact members again over the summer to complete this task.

Consultation

In the summer of 2002 the Law Society of England and Wales and the General Council of the Bar of England and Wales issued a consultation paper on the academic stage of training for entry to the legal profession. Responses were invited from law faculties offering qualifying degrees and from other interested parties and organisations. John Hodgson, who acts as convenor of the ALT policy sub-committee, co-ordinated the ALT response to the consultation paper. The Bar Council and the Law Society published their report, entitled 'The way forward', in March 2003. Again, John Hodgson is co-ordinating the ALT response. If you have any comments that you would like to contribute to the ALT response please send them to john.hodgson.

More recently, other documents and proposals have been received by the ALT, including a consultation paper on the relationship between foundation degrees and the qualifying law degree (from the Bar Council and the Law Society) and a consultation exercise being carried out by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee on reviewing the role of Learning and Teaching Support Network (of which the UK Centre for Legal Education is part), the Institute of Learning and Teaching and the Higher Education Staff Development Agency.

Conferences

The annual conference was held in the law school at the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands from 12-14 April 2003. In all, more than 40 papers were delivered and both speakers and delegates reported enjoying an exciting and vibrant event. A number of colleagues from Europe and beyond attended, as well as members from the UK, and it was a great privilege to be able to welcome many delegates who attended the annual conference for the first time.

Unfortunately, a one day conference on the role of external examiners scheduled to be run in March in conjunction with the UK Centre for Legal Education had to be postponed due to lack of numbers. This will now take place on 6 June 6 in London. This ties in with this year's annual Upjohn lecture, which also takes place on 6 June.

Attendance at other events

I have been delighted to 'wear an ALT hat' at a number of conferences which I have attended over the past year, including the SPTL/SLS conference at De Montfort University in Leicester in September 2002, the Association of American Law Schools conference in Washington DC in January 2003 and the Learning in Law Initiative (LILI) conference in Warwick, also in January 2003. One aspect of the ALT which is very exciting is the increasing international membership and involvement in the ALT, and I hope that this is something which will mature and provide a real benefit to members.

I or other members of the committee have also attended other events organised by the Society of Legal Scholars (SLS), the Law Commission and the Standing Conference on Legal Education (hosted by the Lord Chancellor's Department). It is important that the ALT fosters relationships with other organisations involved in law and its teaching, as it provides a voice for the Association's membership.

Publications and communication

The ALT continues to produce the Law Teacher, the International Journal of Legal Education, which is rightly regarded as a pre-eminent publication and our biggest asset. This significantly enhances the reputation of the ALT both in the UK and beyond, and continued thanks are due to contributors and in particular its editor Nigel Duncan.

Bulletin continues to be an informative and entertaining newsletter, and again special thanks are due to its editor, Mike Cuthbert.

The ALT website is a very useful resource which allows members and others to be kept up to date with developments and events of interest. This is hosted by the UK Centre for Legal Education, and my thanks go to Ann Priestley and Laurence Marr who look after the

maintenance of the site. We are currently looking at revamping the design of the website, so please keep logging on to keep up to date with developments.

Our other communication tool is our e-mail distribution list, which is managed by Michael Doherty, the incoming Chair of the ALT. This allows information to be rapidly distributed to members, and is an effective way of keeping members informed and involved in developments of interest. Our relationships with other organisations, including the SLS, SLSA and BILETA, allow us to disseminate information around their members and to pass on information received from these organisations to you.

As part of the process of widening the membership and influence of the ALT, a mail shot was sent out in February to law schools in the European Union and the Accession States. Included in this was a copy of the 'European edition' of the Law Teacher, published in February of this year. This was timed to tie in with the annual conference in Maastricht and in fact helped to attract delegates from as far away as Poland and Bulgaria.

Projects

In addition to the on-going business of running the ALT, the committee continues to pursue new projects. A number of developments are in the pipeline which will be announced via the Bulletin, the website and the e-mail distribution list when they come to fruition.

Finally, I would like to say that I have enjoyed my year as Chair of the ALT and I would like to thank all of the members of the Committee for their efforts and their support.

Brian Pillans
Chair 2002-03